

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

Community Choirs – A Musical Transformation

A review of my work in management, music, choir leadership and folk-song.

The University of Winchester

Faculty of Arts

Submitted by Sarah Morgan to the University of Winchester

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Abstract for context statement:

Community Choirs – A Musical Transformation

A review of my work in management, music, choir leadership and folk-song.

Sarah Margaret Morgan

Faculty of Arts

Professional Doctorate by Contribution to Public Work

Submission date September 2013

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

Abstract:

My aims have always been to present an exploration of English community choirs, their music and their leadership from a very personal perspective, which brings together my background as a folk musician, my career in training and facilitation, and my developing understanding of a system of musical hierarchies which (though often unspoken) inform and colour not only my own musical experience but that of many others. My motivation for this is partly to put into words the story of a movement that has had relatively little attention from the academic world, and to bring into the foreground aspects of music making which have had a marginal place in the world of choral music. I also wish to draw attention to the skills of a range of performers and practitioners who despite (or perhaps because of) a lack of formal musical qualifications, through familiarity with oral methods of learning and teaching provide a means for many people to make the significant transition between being music consumers and music makers.

This statement is a review of my work in many fields leading to my achievement of the position of a highly regarded performer, choir leader, arranger and trainer. I recount my journey, and give many examples of my work in this field, demonstrating many contributions along the way. In so doing I have added significantly to the store of knowledge and understanding in these areas.

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1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe my aims (1.1) and clarify some of the terminology I shall use (1.2) while also indicating the difficulties inherent in such attempts at definition. In 1.3 I lay out the chapters of this submission, providing a brief explanation of the content. In 1.4 I put forward my claims to originality or to innovation. I then describe my background and the influences on my work (1.5) and outline the values to which I subscribe, setting those in context of other musical value systems currently in operation (1.6). This submission is supported by a portfolio of evidence in a variety of media. These are indicated in the text.

1.1 Aims of this submission

My aim is to present an exploration of English community choirs, their music and their leadership from a very personal perspective, which brings together my background as a folk musician, my career in training and facilitation, and my developing understanding of a system of musical hierarchies which (though often unspoken) inform and colour not only my own musical experience but that of many others. My motivation for this is partly to put into words the story of a movement that (it seems to me) has had relatively little attention from the academic world, and to bring into the foreground aspects of music making which (until the recent televised exploits of Gareth Malone) have had a marginal place in the world of choral music. I also wish to draw attention to the skills of a range of performers and practitioners who despite (or perhaps because of) a lack of formal musical qualifications, through familiarity with oral methods of learning and teaching provide a means for many people to make the significant transition between being music consumers and music makers.

Included in this, as sub-aims, I shall:

- reflect on the place of English folk-song in the community choir repertoire, and describe my contribution to that field.
- explore some models of music leadership, proposing an alternative model for that of community choir leader and identifying important components for the training of such leaders.

1.2 Some definitions and explanations

In writing this submission I realize that I am working with two areas that are hard to demarcate, and which shy away from those who try to corral them with definitions. To assist the reader, some clarification is necessary, however, and below I have explained my pragmatic approach to the issue.

1.2.1 Oral or aural?

The term 'oral' is usually used to refer to speech, and 'aural' to hearing. The term 'oral tradition' is used to describe the process of passing down stories, songs or histories by means of telling or singing them, rather than writing them down. Of course, for the process to work, the aural skills of the listener must be engaged. When teaching songs other than by means of sheet music, both oral and aural skills are important. However, rather than using the cumbersome format of 'oral/aural' I shall in this submission use the term 'oral' (e.g. oral methods of teaching, oral culture). The term 'oracy' " was coined in the 1960s by Andrew Wilkinson, "on the analogy of literacy to stress the importance of the language skills of listening and talking." (Maclure et. al 1988 p.ix). Because of the specific educational connotations of 'oracy', I prefer to follow Ong 1982 and use the term 'orality'.

1.2.2 Community choir

In Bell's (2008) exploration of the American community chorus, she indicates that it is not really possible to provide a clear definition, and I maintain that the same is true of community choirs in England. In Chapter 2 I will discuss this more fully, giving some of the history of the community choir and its similarities to and differences from other types of choir. While no clear definition exists, it is likely that a community choir will incorporate some or all of the following: "a tradition of aural work, a world music repertoire, singing in a circle, and singing for themselves rather than necessarily rehearsing for a performance" (Deane et.al. 2013) as well as a policy of inclusivity, absence of audition procedure and emphasis on singing for fun or well-being.

1.2.3 English folk-song

If the term 'community choir' resists definition, how much more so does 'English folk-song'. The many attempts to create a definition of folk-song, English or otherwise, have (though producing an interesting debate) not resulted in anything totally satisfactory and accepted. It is interesting to note that the UK's Traditional Song Forum

doesn't have a definition of traditional song, as such. I guess that those of us who belong to TSF know what we mean, wouldn't want to exclude anyone else's version of 'traditional song, and (in my view, most importantly) are not prepared to sit through the dreary repetitions of the various people who insist they do have a definition and would like to impose it on everyone else. Ditto 'folk song'. (Graebe 2009)

In this submission I shall follow the line taken by Finnegan (1989) and to some extent by Hield (2010) in following the common usage among people who describe themselves as 'folk musicians' or who define their activities as being part of the 'folk scene'. In her detailed examination of folk music in Milton Keynes, Finnegan suggests that "There can be no definition of local 'folk music' beyond saying that it was the kind of music played by those who called themselves 'folk performers'" (Finnegan 1989 p69). In other words, I shall describe material as English folk-song if it appears to originate from England rather than some other part of the UK (though I appreciate that this is also a subject for debate and exploration) and if has a place within the broad church that is the English 'folk' repertoire. This will mean including some songs that are, or appear to be ancient in origin and, along side these, more recent compositions that have established a place in what can be described as an evolving tradition. I stress that I am concentrating on English folk-song rather than folk-song from the UK as a whole, for reasons which I will touch on in the section on world music and the community choir repertoire.

1.3 Contents of this submission

In chapter 2 I give a historical overview of the community choir movement, describe some of the ways in which community choirs may differ from other sorts of choir, and indicate the significance of these choirs in the hearts and minds of their members. In chapter 3 I will examine the role of the community choir leader, relating it to other leadership paradigms, discuss my own leadership style in context of these varying approaches and consider the issues involved in the training of new community choir leaders. Chapter 4 contains an exploration of shifting relationships between the world of choral music and that of English folk-song, outlining some of the connections and disconnections. I will give some thought to the place of English folk-song in the community choir repertoire, while acknowledging my own contributions to the field. Chapter 5 contains a summary and conclusions.

1.4 My claim to originality and innovation

My claim is supported by a number of activities. These are linked together, but for the purpose of this submission, I will separate them into four areas. These are

- **My use of English folk-song as repertoire for community choirs.**

My use of this type of material as a basis for choir and small group arrangement stretches back over a considerable period of time, and in that time I have produced a substantial body of work, some of which has provided repertoire for other community choirs not only locally but nationally. I have developed my own style, based not on classical training, but on my experience of singing and harmonizing by ear, and have created arrangements which are highly accessible and which make the most of the strengths of community choirs (different from those of classical choirs) while avoiding some of the problems that may arise with a non-auditioning group of singers. Unlike many arrangers, my aim is not to use a folk song as the basis for a choral work, but to create an arrangement that will give a choir the pleasure of singing a folk-song in harmony. Evidence is provided through a portfolio of song arrangements (71) example of the use of my work by other choirs (34, 46) (others can be found via Google and Youtube) and also through a live workshop and performance of songs that I have arranged to be held on 8/10/2013.

- **My role in developing a new perception of the place of English folk-song in the community choir world.**

This is closely linked to the point above. By bringing community choir leaders together at a conference and training event, I have helped to provide new insights about the place of English folk-song in the community choir repertoire, and contributed to the discourse about community choirs. Through the provision of appropriate repertoire (either my own or that developed with colleagues) and training in approaches to song arrangement I have made it possible for community choirs to become more familiar with songs of this type, and thereby gain a greater understanding of our own indigenous music. Evidence is provided through a Conference pack “Out of this World” (including

short and longer-term evaluations) (50) and a course pack for a training event “Singing in harmony” (56).

- **Innovative projects**

One aspect of my work involves setting folk-song in context with other historical or literary material to create a community performance. These performances provide a way in to English folk-song for people who might not otherwise see it as a genre of music that interests them. A case study “The way through the Woods” shows how I have created a package which in different forms, has enabled community groups, choirs and schools to take part in a folk based performance in a variety of settings (32, 35, 42, 44, 66, 69).

- **Musical leadership**

I will describe ways in which I combine experience and understandings gained from folk performance, management training and song workshop leading, and use aspects of good practice from all three areas to enhance my work as a community choir leader, and as a developer of other choir leaders, creating a paradigm of leadership that differs from the traditional notion of the conductor, and developing training materials tailored to the needs of community choir leaders. Evidence is provided on a DVD *Voices from the Choir* (53), by means of various testimonials (72) through a course pack *Songleaders training course* (67) and through a live workshop.

1.5 My story and background

The process of identifying the factors which influence my work as a community choir leader is one of unraveling a number of strands. To understand a piece of research one needs to know certain things about the researcher, and similarly to undertake a piece of research one needs to have some consciousness of one’s own influences. The landmarks on one’s personal journey through life are underpinned and upheld by an underlying geology of genetic inheritance, nurture and laid down experiences, and, like standing stones, are shaped and modified by the wind and weather of personal change and development. I have therefore included in this section material that sheds light on my values and my epistemological stance.

I will explore two strands, the first (1.5.1) relating to music and the second (1.5.2) to training and development. Though these strands appear to be separate, the enhanced vision which hindsight provides allows me to see points of connection that were not apparent at the time.

1.5.1 Musical background

As a child, I was fascinated by singing and harmony. My parents related a story of how, when I was about six years old, I asked my mother how people could sing the same note, but make it sound different each time. My mother had no idea what I meant, but fortunately my father understood that what I was hearing and trying to understand was the effect on the sound when the underlying harmony changes.

Despite my father's identification of some musical ability in me, it did not occur to anyone that music lessons would be a good idea, and we had no musical instruments in the house for most of my childhood, partly due to our living the slightly nomadic life of a forces family. However, school offered me the opportunity to sing in a choir, and I was fortunate in having a skilful and inspiring music teacher who sought out a wide range of songs for us including folk song arrangements by Vaughan Williams and Holst.

My father was a (virtually) self-taught musician, who during his war-time service in Europe had earned many a pint of beer playing (by ear) popular songs of the day in bars and pubs. When I was in my early teens he rediscovered his former interest in the piano. I became used to the sound of his attempts to replicate a piece of music he had heard on the radio, systematically trying out different harmonies until he found the one that sounded just right to him, and this process of finding the harmony by feel, rather than by theory was a significant influence on me.

Eventually I started formal piano lessons, but these lacked the fun, excitement and musical satisfaction that I had found through singing, and they were not continued for very long, though long enough for me to have some basic skills in keyboard playing that would stand me in good stead later on, as well as some rudiments of music theory.

1.5.1.1 Discovering folk music

A musical breakthrough came for me in the 1960s when I was introduced to folk song; in particular the a-capella singing of the Copper family from Sussex and the Waterson family from Yorkshire. It was a period when folk clubs were becoming widespread, and I had numerous

friends who played guitar. When they discovered that I could listen to a track on an LP and quickly work out on the piano what the chords were, I found myself being lent records and asked to figure out chord sequences for my friends' new repertoire. The process of careful listening to these songs and the underlying harmonies not only improved my knowledge of music; it also gave me a very large repertoire, as I learned the songs myself during the process.

I began singing some of these songs in public at the age of 19, and, while working for Community Service Volunteers in Liverpool, formed a partnership with a co-worker who was a fine singer with a talent for vocal harmony. To start with, she would teach me harmonies, so that we could take turns singing melody and harmony, and after a time I began to hear patterns which enabled me to create my own harmony lines, albeit simple. Two year later, I moved to Sussex to start a teacher-training course, and became involved with the vibrant Sussex folk scene that is well documented in Clive Bennett's (2002) detailed account. The Coppers of Rottingdean were both highly respected and influential as a singing family with a heritage of traditional song and during the 1970s Bob Copper ran a folk club at the Central Club in Peacehaven, including on his guest list many traditional singers who were also his personal friends. The Copper family's repertoire and singing style provided not only musical inspiration but also a repertoire that was to become the foundation for many singers. Their harmonies were often "versions of standard harmonic practice such as might be made familiar in the countryside through church choirs, glee clubs and the like" (Lloyd and Collinson 1954 p.146). It is difficult to convey in words the uplifting effect of sixty or more voices providing sturdy harmonies to songs like *Sportsmen Arouse*, *Babes in the Wood* or *The Wedding Song*, but it to this day a source of inspiration to me.

The singers joining in these songs and adding harmonies with such gusto were not singing parts they had learned from music. The learning process generally consisted of standing in a crowd with other singers, listening, and to begin with, trying to replicate some of the harmonies that others were singing. Often, one would pick up the last few notes of a phrase or line, and gradually build up the harmony from back to front! Here is the process as described in Hield's analysis of English folk singing

As more harmonic material is included, singers moderate their part to ensure balance. In this way, the process of negotiating a good harmonic sound within the group results in the scope of harmony altering from chorus to chorus. This on-going process of refinement

develops a more coherent and increasingly complex harmonic structure. Through this negotiation, singers achieve a state of harmony rather than singing in harmony in pre-determined musical terms. (Hield 2010 P179-180)

The notion of ‘negotiated harmony’ is important as it demonstrates the collaborative nature of the process. When confident singers tried something more innovative, approval or disapproval was quickly shown by the extent to which other singers would take up or respond to a new harmonic direction, a process which occasionally gave rise to discord of both a musical and a social nature. Singers with strong voices who persistently sang harmonies that were considered “not to fit” by the majority were thought to be inconsiderate.

As each individual is responsible for their own output and criticism is rarely provided, singers with no ‘ear’ for the music can be oblivious to their lack of adherence to the musical norm and sing (what I perceive as) out of place notes. As the general sound ideal veers towards the informal, these behaviours do not stand out as incongruously as they might in a more structured choir formation, and unusual harmonies are usually accepted as it shows enthusiasm for participation. Although it goes unchallenged, the wrongness of such behaviour remains apparent in terms of perceived good musical practice within this environment. (Hield 2010 p 181)

This grounding in how to produce robust, easily sing-able harmonies was one of the biggest influences on my own arranging of folks songs for choirs.

1.5.1.2 Negative musical experiences

Other powerful though sometimes less positive musical experiences also occurred at that time. Looking back, I can now see that both examples which I give here, relate to a set of musical values which privileges the literate over the oral, the technical over the emotional and performance over participation. To use the language of Foucault, I was discovering that certain types of musical knowledge and experience were considered to be “beneath the required level of cognition and scientificity” (Foucault, 1980 p82)

To apply Foucault’s theories of subjugated knowledge to the world of choirs and singing may seem to be over-inflating the subject matter. However, in my experience, musicality and singing in particular are an intrinsic and important part of a human being’s sense of self, therefore the potentially disempowering effect of privileged knowledge becomes more

apparent and relevant. I illustrate this more specifically in a DVD *Voices From The Choir*, in which choir members speak about their personal experiences (53).

I auditioned for and joined a “formal” choir that specialized in classical works, and sang with them for two years. While the music we performed was wonderful (during my time with the choir we sang Elgar’s *Dream of Gerontius*, among other works) the atmosphere at rehearsals was often tense, individuals were singled out for criticism if they made mistakes, and there was always pressure to learn work for the next concert, after which we would immediately start learning material for the following event; rarely if ever did I find myself singing material that we all knew well enough to allow ourselves relaxation and fun! There was little or no socializing within the choir and time not given to working on the music was regarded as wasting time. This has certainly influenced my current practice as a choir leader; though I do not always get it right, I am keenly aware of the need to balance the challenge of new material with the relaxation and fun of singing songs that we all know really well, and that tension can arise when performance comes onto the community choir agenda. I am also conscious of the fact that for many, choir rehearsal is a time when they meet their friends, a social support as well as a musical occasions. We are a community choir, and so we have to pay attention to both words!

This period of my life also exposed me to one very negative musical experience. It occurred during my second teaching practice, and was similar to the process described here by Small:

a hidden logical chain, or syllogism, underlies much (though fortunately not all) school music practice. It goes like this:

1. Our music (which may be classical music, marching band music, choral music, or big band jazz but rarely improvised or self composed music, which is difficult to control) is the only *real* music.
2. You do not like or are not proficient in or are not interested in *our* music.
3. Therefore you are not musical. (Small 1998 p212)

My main subject was French and my subsidiary subject was music, and on my first teaching practice, my ability to sing folk songs with the children and accompany myself on guitar was regarded as an asset. My second teaching practice was at a direct grant grammar school, and here, these skills were clearly not regarded as ‘real music’. The music teacher drew attention to my lack of formal musical training by asking me (often at very short notice) to play the piano

for assembly, and was swift to criticize me for the inadequacy of my sight reading. It provided for me an interesting though uncomfortable collision of two worlds, setting up a cognitive dissonance between the information that I was both musically able and skilful, and simultaneously unable and unskillful. If my music teacher at grammar school was a positive role model in her enthusiasm and ability to impart a love of singing, this teacher was a negative role model; both have had a long term influence as I seek to emulate the behaviours of the former and avoid those of the latter.

1.5.1.3 Harmony workshops to choir leadership

Over the next few years, I developed my strengths and interests as a performer, and in the 1980s became part of Bread and Roses, a highly regarded four-part vocal harmony group (3, 4). The group gave performances at concerts, folk clubs and folk festivals, and was frequently asked to run harmony workshops. This was a significant step on my journey towards choir leadership, as these workshops involved choosing appropriate material (usually taken from our own repertoire) and teaching songs (in three or four parts) to large groups of people. All four members of the group had teaching or training experience, and our workshops became very popular. By the time the group disbanded I had gained sufficient confidence and reputation to be able to run similar workshops on my own. I had also begun to develop ideas about choir leadership, for example, how to make singing accessible to large groups or how to balance the ambitious singer's desire to perform with the unconfident singer's need to learn without too much pressure.

It was at one such workshop at Whitby Folk Week in 1999 that I was approached by a representative from a village choir in Hampshire. The choir's leader had moved away and they were looking for a replacement – would I be interested? I agreed to a trial period, and then set about seeking both advice and repertoire. I received a great deal of support from Roger Watson, who was then working as Artistic Director of the development agency TAPS (Traditional Arts Projects) (15, 16). In the early 1980s, Roger formed or helped to form a number of choirs in Hampshire, using a model which included open access, no auditions, learning by ear rather than sight-singing (though music was usually given out), and a repertoire which was based largely on folk-songs. Roger arranged many of these songs in a style adapted from West Gallery music, and produced a number of arrangements well suited to groups of relatively inexperienced singers. He generously shared some of these arrangements with me,

as well as inviting me to shadow him at a number of rehearsals. Although I did not always agree with his style of arranging or approach to leadership, I am greatly indebted to him for a valuable learning experience. I helped Roger with the selection of Hampshire folk songs suitable for choir arrangements, for a community choir recording *Beneath Our Changing Sky* (13) and listened to him describing the process of “scoring” a song for a choir. This sounded like a complex process involving a degree of knowledge of musical theory that (with a sudden resurgence of musical inadequacy) I felt sure I did not possess.

1.5.1.4 Arranging songs for choirs

At this time I was aware of a growing number of community choirs that were part of the Natural Voice Practitioners Network founded in the 1970s by Frankie Armstrong. Although this might have seemed an obvious place to go for support and resources, my understanding, from talking to leaders or members of these choirs, was that they tended to sing ‘world music’ which in practice usually meant anything but English music. As I had a strong desire to work within my own area of expertise, English folk-song, I began to wonder where I could acquire more arrangements to teach. Existing arrangements of folksongs by Holst and Vaughan Williams, though superbly crafted and very beautiful, were not only too complex and demanding for my little group of singers, but also seemed to me to have taken the songs a long way from their original spirit. I was looking for arrangements which would be relatively simple to learn, sufficiently open in harmonic structure to allow for the less than perfect intonation of my choir, yet creating a satisfying musical experience for singers and listeners. Having, over a period of years, learned to disqualify my creating of harmony from the realm of ‘real music’, it was some while before I began to consider that the process I had used in working out vocal parts for myself and others in a three or four part group could be applied to music for a choir. Surely my simple method of listening to a melody, improvising a harmony line in my head, and then writing it down, could not be called arranging? In the end, I decided that I would do it anyway, and found myself producing more and more three and four part songs for choirs, which people seemed to enjoy. The publication of my first book of song arrangements, *View The Land* (17) formed an important part of my recognition that I could legitimately call myself a musician, and was a significant step in changing my career direction. I learned on the job, discovering how to create parts suitable for different vocal ranges, what intervals were easy or difficult, and how to ensure that the need to create an interesting chord was balanced with the need for a clear and sing-able vocal line.

For the past ten years I have been part of a harmony trio Craig Morgan Robson. I have arranged some of the songs we sing, others have evolved via a collaborative process of improvisation and negotiation. We have achieved a reputation for creating excellent harmony, we regularly run harmony workshops and many of our arrangements are now being used by groups and choirs. “I bought one of their books. For me, that was the most inspirational part of the conference. I am sure I will use these arrangements again” (Morris 2013) - Caroline Morris of Redbridge Music Service. Copies of our CDs and songbooks appear as (23, 27, 30, 39, 40, 47) in the portfolio.

In the last year, I have been asked to run some training in arranging songs for community choirs, and disclosing some of these negative experiences, along with their ability to generate disabling thought processes, has proved helpful for those who are experiencing similar anxieties. A number of people on the course were of the belief that you could only arrange songs if you had a high level of formal training, and found it extremely liberating to be told that it was quite legitimate to use the ideas that were in their head – that these were, in fact, ‘real music’. The experiences described above, even those which were at the time dispiriting or painful, have informed both my values and my practice as a choir leader and helped me to develop a philosophy of leadership which is discussed more fully in 3.2.

1.5.2 Training, development and facilitation

Over the last 25 years, I have moved from working as a development and training professional, with music as a ‘sideline’ to working as a musician who occasionally undertakes non-musical training or development work. I did not pursue a career in teaching, at least not in the conventional sense. I returned to academic study for a while, gaining a BA in English and history, but the early 1980s saw me fulfilling a girlhood dream of working as a riding instructor in a large equestrian centre near Reading. My manager was an enthusiastic and forward thinking businessman, and when Youth training Schemes were introduced 1983, he saw an opportunity for the development of his business, and invited me to become programme manager for a Youth Training Scheme in Horse Management. As an Accredited Organization we were required to provide at least 13 weeks per year of training away from the job and include life-skills and social skills. Because YTS was so new, and we were a relatively small business, I had little in the way of other models from which to draw, and had to develop most aspects of the scheme myself, from recruitment of trainees right through to final certification.

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When I later applied for a YTS manager post with a local authority, this wide ranging knowledge of the system stood me good stead.

While working in the field of Youth Training it became clear to me that one of the significant factors in the success or failure of trainees was the way in which they were supervised and managed, particularly in the early stages of their work experience, so I developed some basic training sessions for supervisors on topics such as induction. I began to read more about adult training and development, and when a job vacancy occurred in the management training section of the authority, I applied for the post and was successful.

In my next role, I was fortunate enough to work with a group of trainers whose expertise, values and integrity profoundly influenced my own work, and who have generously shared with me their skills, knowledge and resources. One instance springs to mind: my former manager, Robert Pulling, took me on one side (in my early days as a trainer) and explained that I should never be afraid to share or give away knowledge, and the culture of the department in which I worked as a trainer was very much one of sharing information and developing others. I was helped to understand that rather than pulling up the ladder, one should be showing new trainers how to get their feet on the first rung, and holding it steady as they start to climb! This is an approach which I have done my best to emulate.

As a team of trainers we were encouraged to continue our own development, both by attending courses, by working together and by reflecting on our own practice. During my first few years in the training department, I was usually working alongside one or two very experienced colleagues. We would share in the design and delivery of courses and take time after each event to discuss what we had done and how effective it had been. It was normal practice to critique our own work and ask for (and receive) feedback from each other. The training I received 'on the job' closely resembled a "cognitive apprenticeship", which to an extent mirrors the process of craft apprenticeships, providing modelling, coaching and creating an appropriate context for collaborative learning.

learners have continual access to models of expertise-in-use against which to refine their understanding of complex skills. Moreover, it is not uncommon for apprentices to have access to several masters, and thus to a variety of models of expertise. Such richness and variety helps them to understand that there may be multiple ways of

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carrying out a task and to recognize that no one individual embodies all knowledge or expertise. (Collins, Brown, Holum 1991, p1)

This combination of team-working and mutual feedback with my colleagues was essential for “making explicit their tacit knowledge or by modelling their strategies ... in authentic activity.” (Brown, Collins, Duguid p 39). It was indeed a culture of collaborative learning which both encouraged, challenged and supported me in my development and contributed to my growing sense of what it was to be a leader; it also influenced my approach to training choir leaders.

Over the next twelve years I attended a number of courses run by the Human Potential Research Group (founded by John Heron) where I gained an understanding of Heron’s (1998) work on dimensions of facilitator style, and was introduced to new ideas about the politics of learning. It was an exciting time to be involved in training and development. Employers were beginning to take seriously notions of equality, and personal development for women was high on the agenda. I developed training programmes for aspiring women managers, as well as short courses on topics including assertiveness, influencing skills, and use of voice. I also became involved with the International development programme for women known as Springboard , which not only provided me with an excellent model of trainer training (which greatly influenced my design of training for community choir leaders) but also brought me into contact with a wide network of other women working in similar fields. My work also took me into parts of the organization which had very different cultures (for example uniformed services such as Fire or Police, in contrast to Social Services, Youth service or Education departments) and I was able to develop skills of building rapport with staff from widely differing backgrounds and with different values. Another field of work that I explored during the 1980 and 90s was that of stress and stress management. A personal experience of suffering from work- related stress gave me a particular interest in the subject, and as it was an area of concern for Local Authorities at the time, I was able to take a lead in developing appropriate training. Some of the techniques of meditation, visualization and abdominal breathing provided me with transferable skills, which were equally useful when working with singers, especially those encountering anxiety and stage fright.

In 2000 I left local authority employment to spend two years working as Development and Training Manager for the Independent Television Commission (now part of Ofcom) before setting up my own training organization, Bourne Consultancy. In 2003 I was elected to

Fellowship of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. My management work history, examples and testimonials are shown as (5) in portfolio.

1.5.3 Weaving the strands together

My work in development and training had an influence on my choir leadership in many ways. From the start, I probably saw my role as involving facilitation as much as, or perhaps more than, directing, and I was very conscious that people coming to a community choir had very different wants and needs, so that it was important to have a shared understanding of our purpose and direction. At a practical level, one of the most useful skills I acquired was an ability to look around a group and quickly notice people who looked uneasy or uncomfortable, and make it acceptable for people to voice their unease, as well as finding ways of making mistakes an accepted and even a positive part of the process of learning. My understanding of issues to do with organisational culture has given me ways of looking at and understanding the different types of choir I have encountered, while knowledge of group dynamics, team development, of different styles of learning, of personality types, and of the change and transition process has been immensely valuable to me in my choir leader role. More recently, the strands of performer, choir leader and facilitator have come together in a very practical sense with the development and delivery of the Songleaders course (training for community choir leaders)

1.6 Music making and values

In this section I shall look in more detail at some aspects of musical value, and locate my own position within that field. I look in particular at values relating to participative music versus music for performance, at music from an oral versus a literate culture and at amateur versus professional music making,

1.6.1 Performance or participation?

Is music something we do, or something we consume? This is a significant question not only for musicians but for everyone who enjoys music at whatever level. Turino (2008) defines four different fields or categories of music, participatory, presentational, high fidelity and studio art each of which has its own set of standards and conventions. Participatory performance is

a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing

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different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role (ibid p 26)

Presentational performance involves “situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing” (ibid p26).

High Fidelity is “the making of recordings that are intended to index or be iconic of live performance” (Turino 2008 pp. 26-27), while Studio Audio art is:

the creation and manipulation of sounds in the studio or on the computer to create a recorded art object (a "sound sculpture") that is not intended to represent real-time performance. Whereas in high fidelity recordings studio techniques are masked or downplayed, in Studio Audio Art processes of electronic sound generation and manipulation are often celebrated and are often represented in the ultimate recording or sound files (Turino 2008 p27).

Tensions arise when music making or expectations of music cross one or more of these boundaries. For example, in American traditional music there is a difference in approach between “old time” and “bluegrass music”. Singer and musician Joe Penland, who grew up learning songs and tunes from musicians who were part of the community in which Cecil Sharp collected in 1916 explains that in “old timey” sessions, the aim is to get everyone playing the music, so tunes are played slowly at first, and then repeated many times so that people can learn them and join in the session. In many bluegrass circles, by contrast, the emphasis is on demonstrating one’s skill and prowess in front of other performers. (Penland, 2010) In this we see some of the differences between participative and presentational musical cultures in practice.

Folk musicians and particularly those involved in the folk club scene have long been aware of the need to balance the nurturing, shared participative ‘singaround’ format that has done so much to encourage developing performers, and is seen by many as the grass roots of folk music, with the presentational performance approach which may be needed to satisfy the expectations of a paying audience. “Tolerance of low-standard performers is widely found within the contemporary folk singing scene and wide participation remains a prominent goal rather than elitist targets of musical hierarchy” (Hield 2010 p191). However, for the organiser who wishes to encourage ‘floor-singers’ (anyone who wishes to contribute a song or tune) while at the same time getting an income from paying audience members, the choices can be

daunting – whether to encourage the less able performers, at the risk of alienating the audience, or to exclude the less musically skilled performers at the risk of endangering the notion of a musical community within the club. Those audience members who arrive expecting the conventions of the concert performance (especially those who are new to folk music) may well judge the performances as simply ‘below standard’, not realising that those providing the music are marching to the beat of a different drummer, or possibly in the case of folk clubs, a different bodhran player.

1.6.2 Changing values – does getting it right mean getting it wrong?

I turn now to values relating to musical ‘correctness’. Long gone are the days when people made their own entertainment as a matter of course, singing well loved songs round the piano or in the pub and for some, this comes as relief.

Nowadays, thanks to broadcasting, the gramophone and a general raising of standards, we are seldom forced to sit through excruciating musical performances of the kind that our grandparents knew (Norwich 1980 p126).

A move away from an acceptance of music making as a natural element of life (whether at an individual or communal level) has been happening over a period of time, with advances in digital technology hastening the process. There has been a shift in emphasis towards a concept of music as an object rather than music making as an activity (Turino 2008). During the nineteenth and early 20th century, the products of the music industry changed from an emphasis on sheet music and instruments (closely related to practical music making), to sales of recorded music. However, even allowing for the increasing power of radio and recording, there was still a sense the importance of “live people performing with or for other live people” and recordings were valued as “faithful (high fidelity) representations of such performances” (Turino 2008 p.24).

In contrast to such recordings the modern CD (or digital download) has the potential to be a disempowering medium and a creator of illusion for performers of music as well as for listeners. There is a capacity to edit and digitally enhance performance until it achieves a level of note perfection that is unlikely to be replicated in any one live performance. This creates a different set of values, a kind of Platonic ideal against which the live performance must be measured and will almost certainly fall short, especially in the case of the person who makes music ‘just for fun’. In this model of music-making,, one of the things that must be eliminated

is the possibility of ‘going wrong’ and ‘making a mistake’. Yet attempts to eliminate all error do not necessarily produce positive results.

Artists in many fields have long recognised and spoken of the importance of getting it wrong, and have acknowledged the frequently productive and creative nature of mistakes.

to create may be to miss a step in the dance; or to deal a chisel awry when you are carving stone... Only stand back and observe from a distance the activity in this quarter of the city...and mark my words, these noble words are shaped no less by those who botch their gestures than by those who make them deftly; for you cannot divide them up and if you will have but great sculptors you will soon have none at all.... At the core of our perfection will be emptiness and you shall have no joy of it (Saint-Exupery 1950, pp.43-45).

To give a perspective from a different artistic sphere, photographer David Bailey commented in an interview in 2009:

The problem with digital for me is that there's no accident. You can't make an accident, like Rankin he takes a picture then looks at the screen. He moves it over a bit then does another. For me, there's no magic in that. I mean I don't know what's going to come back, it's kind of if I make mistakes it's part of the creation in a way because the only way you can get creative is by making mistakes. With digital there's no mistakes, everything's perfect. (ePhotozine 2009)

Harry Christophers, musical director of choral group The Sixteen, has frequently made a similar point about the dangers of regarding ‘note perfection’ as the supreme artistic goal, giving his view that music should always have some rough edges (though in the case of The Sixteen these are not perceptible to my ear!). This statement notwithstanding, the prevalence of standards deriving from professionally recorded music has produced a situation in which amateur music making still appears to many, though by no means all, as a lesser version of music, the real thing being the music produced by professionals for the rest of us to consume.

Given these unrealistic standards It is hardly surprising that some people experienced a process of “demusicalisation” (Small 1998 p210). Small describes an experiment in which individuals are encouraged to sing. When recordings of their singing were played back to them, regardless of its quality, their comment was on the lines of “Oh, but that isn’t real singing” (Small 1998 p211).

I have described in 1.5.1.2 my own “demusicalisation”. In a similar vein, those involved in less formal music making, (often identified as music making “just for fun”), will say “I’m not really a musician”, regardless of how significant a part music plays in their lives (Turino 2008 p25). As people compare themselves more and more with the artificially enhanced sounds they hear on recordings, so their “demusicalisation” is created or reinforced. And as fewer people in the community sing and make music for fun, the more unnatural music making seems to those growing up in the community, thus continuing the process. As recently as the mid 20th century, many parts of England had a flourishing singing tradition. The 1950 there was an abundance of folk singing in Sussex pubs in the 1950s, “and Surrey and Hampshire are not too far away - all with their own sets of singing pubs and intermingling circles of singers.” (Stradling, 2001). Bob Lewis gives us something of an epitaph for a period rich in local music making.

One of the great losses in life is that, as a nation, most people don’t sing now. The idea that a singer was someone exclusive was not there then. Everybody sang. Some sung well, some didn’t, but singing was as normal as breathing. We sang up the woods, we sang anywhere. You sang when you felt in the mood - you’d be in the pub and someone would start a song and all of a sudden the whole place lit up (Stradling, 2001).

Unfortunately despite the availability of music as a consumer item in many different formats, it is extraordinarily easy for people to become separated or cut off from music making and singing, as indeed from other direct experiences of the arts. In the 2008 DCMS report on “Supporting Excellence in the Arts” Brian McMaster claims that:

One of the biggest barriers to audience engagement is the notion held by many that the arts are simply not for them. The ‘it’s not for me’ syndrome is endemic and conspires to exclude people from experiences that could transform their lives. (McMaster, 2008)

1.6.3 Oral or literate?

Added to these forces working against the amateur music-make is the power of classical music in our value system and the fact that for much of the previous century “it would seem that the western canon held sway – not only as a genre, but as a way of musicking which was about the pre-eminence of performance and of reverential and passive listening” (Deane et al 2013 p4). Western classical music demands a high degree of musical literacy, and the difference between literate and oral approaches is closely allied to concepts of musical correctness. The

use of text and of musical notation encourages us to believe that words and music are fixed. Some musicologists and composers (for example Copland and Hindemith) strongly assert that compliance with the score takes precedence over all other considerations, and that performers should “know their place (and stay there)” (Benson 2003 p12). This is of course only one model of music making; “in the early 1800s this way of thinking represented merely *a* model of music rather than *the* model” (ibid p 16). Just taking one of many examples, in Baroque music the performer was not only permitted to improvise and act as a partner in musical creation but was indeed expected to do so.

Turning to folk music, a study of English folk song collecting will indicate that most singers, unlike Browning’s wise thrush, rarely sing the same song twice over, at least not in exactly the same way. From much further afield, Anatoly Grindenko, leader of the Russian Patriarchate Choir, explained at a recent workshop that their ancient Russian music is “a river, not a road”, to the extent that only the singer who carries the tune has any form of musical symbol written down (Grindenko, 2010).

The turning point between oral and literate cultures may have been in the time of Plato,

when the alphabet had first become sufficiently interiorised to affect Greek thought, including his own, the time when patiently analytic, lengthily sequential thought processes were first coming into existence because of the ways in which literacy enabled the mind to process data” (Ong 1982 p168).

Plato’s attitude to orality contains a degree of ambiguity; at times he expressed concerns about writing as “a mechanical, inhuman way of processing knowledge, unresponsive to questions and destructive of memory” (ibid p24). Elsewhere, he

proscribed poets...because they stood for the old, oral, mnemonic world of imitation, aggregative, redundant, copious, traditionalist, warmly human, participatory – a world antipathetic to the analytic, sparse, exact, abstract, visualist, immobile world of the ‘ideas’ which Plato was touting (Ong 1982 p 167).

Written works demand and encourage abstract thought and objectivity, creating a personal disengagement which “separates the knower from the known” (ibid p44). Moving from oracy to literacy may seem to represent progress, but there are losses as well as gains. As Somali poet Hadrawi says

Our traditional poets used to recite poems without buying any notebooks. They used to recite hundreds of poems from their minds. Here,' he said, touching his head. 'The more dependent you become on pen and paper or on other technology, the more you lose your values.' (Stille 2002 p187)

In a more contemporary setting, users of the Mudcat Café (an internet forum used by many on the folk scene) a contributor to a discussion thread laments the fact that some singers now do not learn the words of their songs, but read them from the screen of their iphone or ipad.

Another Mudcat contributor holds that:

"the words are just the starting point" explains the folk tradition in an economy of words. I think the invention of new verses or the partial, or even complete substitution of half-remembered lyrics is the basis of what some of us still refer to as "traditional folksongs." The basic sense of the song was maintained, (usually,) even when someone changed the lyrics a bit - whether by intent or by accident of memory. (Mudcat Café 2013)

Convenient though it may be to assume a binary opposition between the supposedly objective, analytic, fixed and exact literate approach and the "warmly human" participatory oral approach, I do not believe this opposition to be entirely helpful, any more than I find it helpful to privilege learning by ear over singing from written music at all costs. Many singers and musicians make use of both systems of music learning.

Oral transmission, musical illiteracy, if not ignorance of letters, are often considered the *sine qua non* of folk song tradition; yet over much of Europe folk singers have been learning a certain number of their song-texts from print since the sixteenth century, and folk musicians have repeatedly availed themselves of printed tune-books for the last two hundred years, if not longer. Moreover, large numbers of songs have been preserved in family notebooks, which have been sometimes passed round among the neighbours for copying. Such books usually contain only the texts of songs, but sometimes include the melodies also. (Lloyd and Collinson 1954 p.146)

The English vernacular carolling tradition, while being "flamboyant, exuberant and participative" (Russell 2011 p.2), also involved the use of music notation, though it is likely that musicians "did not stick slavishly to the notes on the page" (Russell 2011 p.6), and would often memorise the music, leading to "a certain amount of improvisation or personal interpretation" (Russell 2011 p.7). Most folk musicians would understand the term 'the folk process' "by

which cultural artifacts are changed, whether minutely or in significant amounts, to form new cultural products” (Macdonald 2005); folk singers and musicians may make use of written music or recorded music, but will make that ‘their own’ so that over the course of time the piece may develop a distinct identity.

Perhaps in a truly balanced world we would value both the written and the oral in music. In our far from ideal world I tend to agree with those who deplore a society so dominated by logocentricity that we have to be reminded that true communication needs human interaction, and that there is a “mutual tuning-in relationship, the experience of the ‘We’, which is at the foundation of all possible communication” (Schutz p173 cited in Martin 1995 p 200). If (through over-dependence on reference to text and notation) we become too taken up with concepts of ‘correct versions’ and ‘the right way to do it’ we reduce our capacity to take risks and in so doing, remove one of the essential elements of creativity.

1.6.4 Professional and amateur musicians

Running through both the community choir movement and the folk revival is a history of musical subculture or counterculture, which can be considered in relation to “the counter-culture prevalent throughout the Western industrialised nations during the late 1960s” (Higgins, 2008). Although English community choirs would not necessarily see themselves as having connections with the folk scene, I perceive some parallels between these two musical activities. For many members of the folk scene, as for many community choir members, their musical activities provide “a deep meaning and value to their view of themselves and their experience” (Finnegan 1989 p.70). Yet these forms of music making, “the people’s music” (Sharp and Karpeles, 1965) and what we might term ‘the peoples’s choirs’, highly significant though they might be to participants, are not always valued externally, and are indeed often perceived as of low status compared to some other forms of music making. It is still considered acceptable in some circles to make fun of our musical heritage: On December 3rd. 2001 during a parliamentary debate, then Junior Culture Minister Kim Howells gave a clue to his musical values in the following statement: "For a simple urban boy such as me, the idea of listening to three Somerset folk singers sounds like hell."

I would argue that these participatory forms of music-making , rather than being a lesser or lower grade than those made by professionals, are “a different form of art and activity entirely - and that they should be conceptualised and valued as such” (Turino 2008 p26). The concept

of informal or amateur as the “lesser version” points us back to the comments of John Julius Norwich, or to our unachievable ideal. The worth and status of oral, improvised, informal or amateur music making can be eroded both explicitly (e.g. Howells and Norwich) and in more subtle ways, by use of terminology such as high or low culture, amateur and professional musician, national, or local performer, and so on.

How are we to value or evaluate amateur or community music? I do not refer to short-term projects in which music is somehow ‘given back’ to the community, but the real, sustainable, continuity of making music at a local level. The McMaster Report tells us: “The best definition of excellence I have heard is that excellence in culture occurs when an experience affects and changes an individual. An excellent cultural experience goes to the root of living.” (McMaster, 2008) However, “excellence” here appears to be something that certain artists have, or may acquire, which is then presented to an audience. People must be “given access” to the arts, which implies that there is something about art (in its widest sense) which we cannot do for ourselves, it is in someone else’s gift, handed out to lesser mortals. Contrast this with the saying (believed to be African but now claimed by many nations) “If you can move, you can dance, if you can speak you can sing” (Source unknown).

It is not surprising, “given the accepted emphasis in academic and political circles on great musical masterpieces, professional music or famed national achievements” (Finnegan 1989, p xviii) that the skills of amateur music-makers are often unrecognised or underestimated. In many community choirs, the singers, like many folk musicians, learn by ear, and have committed a huge number of songs (including complex harmony parts and intricate rhythms) to memory. This is a skill, just as is the reading of a musical score, and both are admirable in their different ways. I recall a visit from some classically trained musicians to a community choir rehearsal at which I was teaching “Wassail the Silver Apple” (O’Connor 1999). The singers learned a verse and chorus by ear in their usual way. One of the visitors looked at my copy of the music and noticed that within the space of 20 bars, the timing changed from 4/4 to 3/8, then to 2/4, 3/8, 1/4, 3/8, 3/4, 3/8, 5/8, 2/4 and back to 4/4! He remarked that he was astonished that these untrained singers could manage such complicated rhythms. The singers, however, did not perceive a difficulty; they listened to my singing, and copied the timing using the oral musical abilities that singers have always used, employing not inferior, but different skills.

Finnegan suggests that

Once one starts thinking not about “the best” but about what people actually do – about ‘is’ not ‘ought’ – then it becomes evident that there are in fact several musics, not just one, and that no one of them is self-evidently superior to the others. (Finnegan, 1989 p6).

Indeed, the use of terms such as amateur and professional when applied to musicians creates an inaccurate picture:

In local music...the at first sight ‘obvious’ amateur/professional distinction turns out to be a complex continuum with many different possible variations. Indeed, even the same people could be placed at different points along this line in different contexts or different stages of their lives (Finnegan, 1989 p14)

Yet the value judgements, the compulsion to judge forms of music making as better or worse, higher or lower, still seem hard to avoid, cropping up wherever one turns. In a recent television programme, Gareth Malone was in conversation with a shanty singer. (*Shanties and Sea Songs with Gareth Malone*, 2010). Describing the shanty men of the past, he made the point that these people were probably illiterate both in language and music, so they “just made it up”. The implication was that they were therefore not as good as someone who could read and write and use music notation. As a corollary to that, I described the comments in the programme to a group of singers who were working on improvising harmonies, which provoked a discussion about the differences in value implied by terms ‘composing’, ‘improvising’, and ‘making it up’. Later on, I happened to mention that an overture had been specially composed, to accompany a concert performance by the group. To this one member commented with a grin “Ah, you mean she just made it up!”

1.6.5 Where my personal values fit into this picture

As a community choir leader, my values include working in a way that feels authentic, both musically and personally, respecting my intuition about group processes (knowing these to be founded on good experience), making sure that knowledge and resources are shared, and demystifying music - acting in ways that gently but firmly challenge peoples perceived lack of musical ability. I prefer not to use the term ‘empowering’, as to me that implies that people lack a power which I can mysteriously bestow on them. I do strongly believe that everyone has the ability to experience and enjoy singing in some way, and I see my role as helping to

remind people of that, and trying to remove barriers, where they exist, whether they relate to musical technicality, terminology, accessibility or skills. I am very conscious that:

Music education has defined singing through the perspective of Western classical music that primarily values performance, perfection and virtuosity. This view of singing is valuable and worthy of perpetuating but, I believe, has had the effect of excluding many from experiencing singing or, at the most basic level, believing they can sing. I suggest embracing a second aesthetic for singing in music education. The first is the standard or “taproot” aesthetic that has been recognised in music education since its inception in the mid 1800s. The second is an aesthetic for singing which stresses community building, diversity, group collaboration and relationship. (Pascale 2005).

Pascale’s “Aesthetic A” emphasises product and performance over process and participation, and technical skills building (in a musical context) over social values and recreation, while in “Aesthetic B” the emphasis is reversed, with no restrictions on who is considered “good enough” to sing. My values accord closely with this second aesthetic.

I am keenly aware of the tension between participative and presentational values, and between the ways in which we value oral and literacy skills in music, and I have, at times, had to make choices which were uncomfortable either for me or for choir members, or both.

In terms of valuing the oral or the literate aspects of music, I resist a polarized approach. I believe it is important for people to rediscover the ability to learn and sing ‘by ear’ and I am aware that a perceived need to read music can be a barrier for many. However, it need not always be a barrier, and from time to time I give out music so that people who are alarmed by it begin to lose their fear and see it as a resource. Because much of my material is folk based, I also explain that the music is usually just a guideline or a reminder, not a set of precise instructions – a river rather than a road.

I also feel strongly about teaching songs in my native language rather than going down the ‘world music’ route taken by so many community choirs. For me, it is important to understand the culture and background to a song that one is going to teach, and some of this comes not just from reading about it but by living in it and with it. This applies particularly to teaching English folk-songs, which are often deceptively simple but which make great demands on the singer in terms of phrasing and interpretation. I have been fortunate enough to have sat in

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back rooms of Suffolk inns where farmers and farm workers have sung anything from ballads to music hall novelties, stood (packed in, shoulder to shoulder) in a Yorkshire pub singing local carols, and talked and listened to the children and grandchildren of one of George Gardiner's source singers. Though I listen with pleasure to singers of African or Georgian material, this is not the soundtrack of my life, and not what I choose to teach.

I am very clear keeping to a policy of not auditioning, and of accepting and involving anyone, whether or not that person has "a good voice". Running a large community choir in Winchester (where there are many excellent choirs) has resulted in a very mixed membership, some of whom are keen to perform in concerts and want to set ever higher standards, while some are clearly less able singers (though just as enthusiastic). The course handout for the Voice Leaders Course suggests that although some of the time "it's fine to have people who can't sing in tune". If it's preparing for a performance, you may want to do some individual coaching, suggest that people sit out for songs they're less sure of " (Armstrong and Pritchard 2011 p.43). Of course, some people feel "sure" of a song without being able to sing it in tune! From my own point of view I choose not to ask people to sit out of anything, but aim to work with the singers to create as good as sound as possible while not excluding those who may not have access to other choirs, in the belief that

the best performance must be one that empowers all the participants to do this most comprehensively, subtly and clearly, at whatever level of technical accomplishment the performers have attained (Small 1998 p. 215).

Adherence to this ideal has meant that sometimes the strongest and most confident singers leave after a while to join some other kind of choir; though this sometimes throws up doubts about my policy I have generally been able to point out that this happens in any organization; people learn, grow, and move on, and though I am sad to lose them, I am glad to have helped them to a new level of musical confidence. Giving people a chance to perform is often part of my choir leadership role, but I am mindful that the really important part of what I do is to let people share the enormous pleasure of singing together in harmony without apprehension, and with a perception that they are making 'real music'.

2 The Community Choir Movement

Introduction

In the first part this chapter (2.1), I give an overview of the community choir movement. I attempt to define the term “community choir” or at least to narrow its descriptive field, and locate as far as possible it in a historical context while making links with other forms of community music making in song. While exploring the breadth and diversity of community choirs, their culture and repertoire, I introduce questions about the place of English folk songs as source material for this type of choir. NB archive of material relating to Winchester Community choir is in portfolio (22).

In 2.1.1 I unpack some of the uses of the word community in relation to community choirs. I will discuss in 2.1.2 some of the historical roots such as West Gallery Choirs and Socialist Choirs, which may have nurtured and informed the development of the modern community choir. In 2.1.3 I turn to the influence of the Natural Voice Network, and attempt to tease out the characteristics that set a community choir (whether or not it uses that name) apart from choirs of other types, before developing in 2.1.4 a model to aid in the understanding of different types of choir, and the positioning of community choirs in a “choral continuum”. In 2.1.5 I give examples of choirs in their own terms and descriptions, which lead into my model of a choral continuum (2.1.6) followed by some conclusions in 2.1.7.

2.1 The Community choir – history and background.

Go into any English town or village and look on the notice board – in the library, outside the village hall or shop – and it is highly likely that you will see some kind of choir or singing group mentioned. In the last 15 years there has been a huge resurgence of interest in singing at an amateur level; this has shown itself in the growth and development of all kinds of choirs, from children’s choirs to formal adult choirs, and all shapes and sizes in between. One aspect of this extraordinary choral revival is the so-called “community choir”.

2.1.1 Use of “community” in the understanding of community choirs

How does one go about creating a definition of a community choir? A community choir can be variously described as a community, a group and/or an organization, all of which are complex and multi faceted terms involving a range of issues; social, psychological, political, geographic and functional. (Bell, 2008) points out in her analysis of the American community choir movement “Definitions can be confining and limiting; they can also provide clarity and a universal meaning...” and she concludes that (as far as the American choral singing experience is concerned) “there is no consensus on what, exactly, is meant by a community chorus” (Bell 2008). However, some exploration of what community means in the context of community choirs, though not providing all the answers, will I believe provide valuable insights.

In unpacking the term community, Smith (2001) identifies three areas for exploration: place or locality, common interest such as “the gay community” and communion, a sense of attachment to a place, group or idea. I shall address some of these areas using examples taken from my own community choirs and those with which I have the closest contact.

2.1.1.1 *Community as location*

If we take the notion of community as something contained within a geographical area, such as a group of people who live in particular place, then a community choir could be understood as a choir based in a specific neighbourhood, and drawing on singers from within a defined geographical boundary or catchment area. In practice many choirs (community choirs and others who do not so define themselves) draw on singers from beyond their immediate locality, and do not set geographical limits for membership. For example Winchester Community Choir describes itself thus:

“Winchester Community Choir is an open access choir for the people of Winchester in Mid Hampshire. Formed in late 2005, we now have almost 100 members who meet weekly to sing for fun and give regular performances in the community and to raise money for local causes.”(Winchester Community Choir)

In practice, though most members come from Winchester itself, many travel from other areas to come to the choir, for example from Romsey (12 miles), Alresford (11 miles), Chandler’s Ford (8 miles), Eastleigh (6 miles), and Southampton (14 miles). In Andover the Spotlight Singers draw members not only from the town but also from surrounding villages such as

Collingbourne Ducis (12 miles), Over wallop (9 miles) Hatherden, 5 miles, Whitchurch (7 miles), Redenham (7 miles).

It is interesting to note that although some community choirs use the name of a town or location, many choose not to do that, using names such as Volcano, Hullabaloo, Blue Sky, Heart and Soul or Kaleidoscope, which create an image other than that of a specific place. The notion of place and geographical boundary can be seen as exclusive as well inclusive – boundaries function as a means of keeping people out as well as keeping them in – and the use of a name such as Winchester Community Choir does occasionally provoke the question – “I don’t live in Winchester, so am I allowed to join?”. Winchester Community Choir (like many others) also sees itself as having a role in the life of the neighbourhood, in other words, the perceived local community. It does this by supporting local charities through money raised at concerts, by singing at events that are part of the city calendar, such as the Christmas market, as well as providing entertainment at local care homes. The Mayor of Winchester is always invited (and usually attends) the choir’s Christmas concert, thus underlining the choir’s connection with the civic community, and a link has also been established with the University of Winchester.

The element of locality or territorial community can be a valuable concept for community choirs. Where a choir has members who may have come from a wide range of geographical locations, one of the factors linking members together is that they are all living in a specific location. This notion of the power of place or regionality in drawing people together has especial relevance when it comes to the choice of choir repertoire, and I shall explore the issue further in Chapter 4.

2.1.1.2 Community – *shared practice and shared activity*

In Ahlquist’s study of community music “Chorus and Community” (Ahlquist, 2006) we can find a variety of different uses of the word community, in relation to singing. Barz (Ahlquist p 25) gives a definition of community as it pertains to his field research: “a group of people that gathers for a reason; whether to remember and recall, to share, or to create new experiences.” Communities, he suggests “are often fluid social structures that allow people of similar or dissimilar backgrounds to cooperate on shared objectives”. Wenger’s theory of “communities of practice” sheds some light on the functioning of a community choir.). For Wenger, the three essential criteria for a community of practice are the domain (of shared

interest), the community (engagement in shared activities), and shared practice. Thus a “community of practice” has a clear identity that is not just a shared interest or a social network, but goes beyond that, calling both for commitment and shared competence. Joint activities and relationships are important:

'In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other' (Wenger, 2006)

The final element is shared practice. 'Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction' (Wenger, 2006). Community choirs almost certainly meet the first two of Wenger’s criteria. The third element is more likely to be found in choirs that have a longer lifespan and continuity of membership.

2.1.1.3 *Belonging and communion*

Considering community in terms of a group of people, Fine’s examination of small groups is helpful: he identifies these as groups that:

“depend upon personal (typically face-to-face) interaction with the recognition by participants that they constitute a meaningful social unit. Although size affects what constitutes a "small" group, generally the term refers to a collective whose members know each other as distinct individuals.” (Fine and Harrington, 2004)

Fine points out that boundaries and memberships of groups are fluid and that definitions of them may alter from time to time but adds that “Through small groups, individuals find arenas to enact their autonomous selves and to demonstrate allegiance to communities and institutions.” And later “The small group is not only instrumental in the creation of collective action but also determines how individuals conceive of their own identities.” (Fine and Harrington, 2004)

If as Fine suggests, the community (interpreted as a group) helps to establish identity for individuals, it can also establish an identity that goes beyond the individual. Bowman describes the centrality of collective identity in music making:

“At the centre of all music making (and all educating that is musical and all musicking that is educational) lies a ‘we’, a collective identity that dialectically and powerfully influences individual identity. Whom this ‘we’ includes and excludes, whose and what kind of communities are created and sustained by our musical actions, are important questions both for music educators and policy makers.”(Bowman, 2009)

The notion of how a sense of “we” is created within a community choir is reflected in the two comments below, both from community choir members. The first quotation was a response to a Facebook comment from me about the enjoyable rehearsal we had just completed, and the second was a response to that, from another choir leader.

“There is something about musical activity involving a group (e.g. playing in a band, singing in a choir) that brings about a sense of communal achievement and enjoyment - but it is more than just that. Reaching a sense of "we" means we are also connecting on a higher level (some would say spiritual) but whatever it is, it is something very special.” (Meats, 2011)

"One of my singers said: What I like about harmony singing is that it allows me to forget about "me" and experience "we."" (Burbidge, 2011)

These two comments, one from a member of Winchester Community Choir, and the other from Lakeland choir leader David Burbidge, illustrate the potentially powerful nature of social interaction in the community choir. They introduce a concept of connections which are not just interpersonal but which also function at a more spiritual level. The indication of a sense of belonging and of emotional connection echoes Buber’s notion of a meeting of souls, the unity of being with others expressed by Buber as “I-thou”, rather than the detachment and separation that he categorizes as “I-it” ((Buber, 2010).

This connection at a spiritual level is one that many struggle to find in contemporary society, and it can be argued that community choirs (by enabling access to shared musical experience) provide one of the ways in which a profound human need can be met “Indeed some would see music as the last remaining ubiquitous spiritual experience in a secularised Western culture” (Boyce-Tillman, 2004)

2.1.1.4 Community – some conclusions

Community manifests itself in community choirs in many ways, from the experiencing of “we’ rather than “I” mentioned above to awareness of communal achievement and then to the apparently more mundane but nonetheless valuable aspects of social networking such as friendships within the choir, shared meals, offers of help to choir members in difficulty, transport to events and so on. Geographical location is perhaps not as significant as it might at first appear, especially with public transport and car ownership allowing catchment areas to grow ever wider. So it could be argued that the term community choir is often (though not exclusively) used to mean a choir that is also a community (with all that the word entails), rather than a choir that comes from or in some way represents a community. In understanding the term “community choir”, as in the term “community music” both words are of significance. In the concluding statement of the 1990 Seminar of the ISME Commission on Community Music Activity Olseng puts forward the view that:

“Community music is characterized by the following principles: decentralisation, accessibility, equal opportunity, and active participation in music-making. These principles are social and political ones, and there can be no doubt that community music activity is more than a purely musical one.” (Olseng, 1991, pp. 83-84)

Exploring the meanings of the word community in the context of choirs is beneficial to an extent, but can also become an endless study in itself. In her analysis of folk singing communities Hield makes the point that

“Terms do not take their meaning from an immutable relationship with objective reality, but from their use in discourse. The question of what is a community is an obstinate one to which there is a debate rather than an answer and I hope to advance the debate by means of actively using the term throughout this thesis. I use the term community to describe a feeling of belonging within a group, and occasionally to describe a group within which this feeling is widely felt.” (Hield 2011 section 1.3.1)

Acknowledging Hield’s argument, I shall take a similar line, in my use of the term community in context of community choirs, and allow layers of meaning to develop during the work that follows.

2.1.2 Community choir – historical roots and connections

2.1.2.1 Socialist choirs

When attempting to trace the roots of community choirs, one interesting source of information is the world of the socialist choirs of the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the three decades prior to the first world war, rising income for many skilled workers, reduction in working hours, and development of a leisure industry were factors which fostered the development of a working class culture. “As early as the 1890’s, for example, some fourteen million visits were paid each year to thirty-five of London’s music halls” (Waters, 1990) P1. During this period, the impulse to ‘improve’ the working classes leisure activities as part of a drive towards social well-being, became both more urgent and more complex. So-called ‘ethical’ socialists believed that the reform of popular culture was of crucial importance, because if workers could see what (improved) leisure could be like in socialist society, they would be motivated towards helping to create that society. It was thought that “popular culture was important – too important, in fact, to be left to the purveyors of commercial entertainment” (Waters 1990 p2). This form of improvement was seen as a way of counteracting mass-produced culture. In a similar vein, William Morris and his followers sought to bring about improvements by means of craftsmanship. Morris also disliked what he saw as the hideous results of mass-production. He believed that the machine-bred ugliness debased design and debased the lives of industrial workers, and that salvation lay in a return to craftsmanship. In [Art and Socialism](#), a lecture to the Leicester Secular Society on January 23rd, 1884, Morris wrote

“ I beg you to think of the enormous mass of men who are occupied with this miserable trumpery, from the engineers who have had to make the machines for making them, down to the hapless clerks who sit day-long year after year in the horrible dens wherein the wholesale exchange of them is transacted, and the shopmen, who not daring to call their souls their own, retail them amidst numberless insults which they must not resent, to the idle public which doesn't want them but buys them to be bored by them and sick to death of them.”

In the late 19th century, the mechanization of labour and the speeding up of work and of life in general was seen by critics such as Thomas Wright (the journeyman-engineer) as a negative force, which would in time destroy the worker’s imagination, intellectual capacity “shrewd

common sense” (Waters p10) leaving a working class shackled by the “mind forged manacles” predicted a century earlier by William Blake in his poem ‘London’ (pub 1794).

Where Morris wanted to create a utopia through craftsmanship, others sought it by means of music. ‘Many Victorians assumed that music could exert a refining influence in society, elevating the passions and paving the way for social harmony.’ Waters P98. In 1898 the Keighley Labour Journal praised the work of the socialist Clarion Vocal Union which had been founded by Blatchford, implying (Waters suggests) that “choral singing would be one of the more important pleasures of a socialist society” (Waters P97)

By 1895 there were more than a dozen Clarion choirs, the largest group being in Blatchford’s home town, Halifax, where there were nearly 150 members. By 1896, national CVU membership reached 1,250. “In May 1899 the first CVU United Concert at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester took place, with 450 singers in fourteen choirs competing for the ivory and gold Challenge Baton which had been presented by the Clarion Board. This was to be an annual event for the next thirty years, bringing hundreds of Clarionettes to Manchester, cyclists and non-cyclists alike” (WCML, 2009).

Two ideas were of great significance, one, the paramount importance of intellectual pleasures such as music, and two, the important role of choral singing not just a one of these intellectual pleasures, but as an instigator for change and therefore a matter central to the socialist movement. But what should they sing? Blatchford claimed that the working classes neither understood nor wanted ‘high art’: “ ‘formal classical coldness... and involved metaphysical art’ he wrote, ‘are no use to them at all. No, they must have art of that own, art that is built upon their lives” (Waters p98) Nonetheless, in apparent disregard of his own assertions, Blatchford argued for the revival of Tudor madrigals, scarcely music of the people.

Folk-song collector Cecil Sharp, who described himself as a “conservative socialist” wanted to create a new “music of the people” by means of English folksong which he described as:

“ transparently pure and truthful, simple and direct in its utterance. And these are the invariable attributes of the people’s music. Folk melodies may not always appeal to us with irresistible force, or strike us as transcendently beautiful; but they are always sincere, and free from that pretence and affectation which are the invariable concomitants of bad art in general and bad music in particular” (Sharp and Karpeles, 1965) p 45.

and:

“Being the product of a past era, it possesses a historical and archeological value which will commend it to some....but it is not merely on these, or upon any sentimental grounds, that the resuscitation of the English folk song is here advocated.....is it, apart from all other considerations, beautiful in itself, judged as music, pure and simple, and judged, too, by the very highest standard?”
p179

Hugh Haweis, an influential writer on the subject of social reform, published *Music and Morals* in 1871, suggesting a link between certain melodic forms and the engendering of socially desirable emotions. He believed in the powers of “good” and “bad” music to promote or erode morality, and argued that both music and emotion needed careful study in order that good and bad could be clearly defined and understood. Much of Haweis’s and Sharp’s writing fell on fertile ground – the climate was right for their arguments. In 1840 the Committee of Council on Education had come to the conclusion that music could “‘wean the mind from vicious and sensual indulgences’, calling for a national system of music education that would stimulate feelings of loyalty and patriotism” (Waters p99). Only a few dissenting voices, such as those of George Bernard Shaw, suggested that better social conditions were more important to the workers than concerts and “improving” music. Nonetheless, as Waters points out “by 1900 choirs had come to occupy such a prominent place in the rich associational life of the socialist movement that one historian has noted that ‘the main cultural thrust of the early socialist movement was in music’ (Waters p97).

The Socialist musical repertoire was created from songs specially written (like the 'Song of the Clarion Scout') and from appropriate poems were set to music.

“Young composers and musicians were drawn to the cause, like Gustav Holst, who was a regular cyclist and often rode with his trombone strung across his back. While studying at the Royal College of Music and living in a bed-sitter in Hammersmith, Holst became the first conductor of the Socialist Choir there. He wrote reports for the *Clarion* about the choir, one of whose members was his future wife Isobel. Holst's fellow student Rutland Boughton, set poems by William Morris to music, and they appeared in the *Clarion Song Book* published in 1906.” (WCML, 2009)

Unsurprisingly, music was used not only by the left but also by the right political wing. The Primrose League, founded in the late 1890s, had grown by 1910 to a membership of nearly two million, and a time when the entire national electorate was only 7.7 million.

“The league tapped into the great Victorian mania (which Disraeli himself had encouraged) for instantly manufactured romance. Its officers were called things like "knight harbinger", "squire" or "dame". Its branches were known as "habitations". Its junior members (6,000 of them in Croydon alone in the 1890s) were "buds". "Children of the Empire/Primrose buds are we," they sang, "Marching, ever marching/On to victory. The league delighted in fêtes in Tory stately homes, dances, sashes, enamel badges and evening entertainments. Magic lantern shows with slides of scenes from the Empire were popular. The league's Gazette recommended "a song by a local baker, next a violin solo offered by the librarian, and finally animal interpretations presented by the valet from the big house". (Moore, 2010)

The emphasis on fun and variety contrasts with the high toned attempts at cultural improvement provided by some of the Socialist organisations. As Lady Salisbury (wife of the Prime Minister) reportedly commented to a critic of the Primrose League "Of course it's vulgar. But that is why we have got on so well." (Moore, 2010) Indeed, as Vaninskaya in (Vieira and Freitas, 2005) points out, it was this very element of vulgarity that caused socialists such as Robert Blatchford and Clarion co-founder Alexander Thompson, to become disillusioned and exasperated by the working classes, and made them question whether the people were intelligent or educated enough to desire socialism.

There is no doubt of the popularity of the socialist choirs such as the Clarion Vocal Union, but that does not necessarily make such choirs the forerunners of the modern community choir. Indeed, the overt aim of improving the working classes would scarcely be acceptable to the community musician of today, although there might well be common ground in their desire to promote well-being in the lives of ordinary people. Having said that, there are some choirs that still proudly proclaim their links with the socialist choirs of earlier days. The Birmingham Clarion singers were formed in 1939, by [Dr Colin Bradsworth](#) who had served with the [International Brigade](#) in Spain and was a member of the Clarion Cycling Club (closely linked to the Clarion Vocal Union). The choir gave concerts “to the troops, in factory canteens, in air-raid shelters and on the streets.”(Clarion Singers, 2011). The choir was warmly supported by Vaughan Williams, performing his opera “Sir John in Love” in March 1949 at the Birmingham

and Midland Institute, conducted by Professor Anthony Lewis from the University of Birmingham. The choir is associated with the Workers' Musical Association (WMA), and has a history of involvement with the Trades union movement and with music which represent the lives of working people, such as Ewan McColl's radio ballads. Bolton and Nottingham also have so-called Clarion Choirs, and the WMA website lists seven affiliated choirs and seventeen more UK based choirs with evocative names such as Velvet Fist , Raised Voices and , with a nod to William Morris, Strawberry Thieves, all choirs who "the WMA regards ... as allies in the attempts to campaign through music" (Workers, 2010).

East Lancs Clarion Community Choir was formed in 1998 for "all adults (over 16) who want to sing together". Choir members participate in singing festivals such as [Street Choirs](#) and [Raise Your Banners](#), and are involved with community events and projects such as Burnley May Day Parade, Burnley Community Chest and East Lancs Community Cohesion Programme as well as with making links with international development and the peace movement via International Women's Day and CND (Clarion Choir Burnley, 2011).

2.1.2.2 West Gallery Choirs

The village choirs of Thomas Hardy's day represent a particular kind of community based choir. In the period between 1700 and the late 1800s small groups of singers and musicians provided the music in church; these same musicians were also often to the fore in village entertainment, supplying not only singing but music for dancing, a combination of roles which made them a significant part of a village community.

"There is no doubt that the mixed groups of instrumentalists and singers which we refer to as 'quires' to distinguish them for the organ-driven, surplised latter-day groups, became very important in parish life. Those who played for the singing in church would also have played a major part in parish social life on feast days, high days and holidays. They had status within parish society, the nature of their jobs often gave them a measure of independence, and they were not infrequently in conflict with the parson or the squire."
(West Gallery Music Association, 2011a)

In his preface, written in 1896, to "Under the Greenwood Tree" Hardy regrets the passing of the village quires and bands, which were superseded by the barrel organ and then the harmonium.

“Under the old plan, from half a dozen to ten full grown players, in addition to the numerous more or less grown up singers, were officially occupied with the Sunday routine, and concerned in trying their best to make it an artistic outcome of the combined musical taste of the congregation. With a musical executive limited, as it mostly is limited now, to the parson’s wife or daughter and the school-children, or to the school-teacher and the children, an important union of interests has disappeared”. (p xviii) (Hardy, 1989)

Although these West Gallery choirs (named for the gallery in the church where they would usually be seated) and their music seemed to be lost by the beginning of the 20th century, there has been a very strong revival of interest in the past 25 years, and in its modern incarnation, the West Gallery choir has some common links with community choirs. One factor which distinguishes the West Gallery choir from many others is the way in which the parts are allocated among singers. The following description was written by James Carlisle in 1821.

"In the older collections of music for public worship, the air is uniformly given to the tenor voices, obviously because it was expected that the voices of the men would predominate in congregations. Two parts were thus placed above the air, namely the 1st Treble [soprano] and Counter Tenor [alto], and the Bass below it. This arrangement was intended as well to give effect to the small proportion of voices that could be expected to sing any other part than the air, and thus to cause the harmony added to the air to be felt, where parts placed between the air and the bass would have been lost in the overpowering loudness of the former. Modern composers of sacred music have usually reversed the order, and have arranged the parts as for a regular choir, in which the strength of every part may be kept in just proportion to the rest, and having [sic] given the air or tune to the 1st treble, thus placing all the other parts under it. But this arrangement, while it is doubtless best for a choir, is altogether unsuitable for congregations in which the whole body of the people are expected to unite in singing. ... Those musicians, therefore, who adopt this arrangement of the parts ... attempt to silence the great body of the people, and to confine the singing of the praises of God to select choirs."(West Gallery Music Association, 2011b)

The emphasis is on encouraging “the whole body of the people...to unite in singing”, a view to which most community choirs would also subscribe. As I shall describe later, many community choirs avoid the familiar terminology of “soprano, alto, tenor, bass”, either to dissociate

themselves from the conventions of classical music or to encourage flexibility of approach among their singers.

West Gallery choirs are a specialized form of choir, with a repertoire largely taken from church music of the 18th and early 19th century. However, there is an unusually strong link between West Gallery singing and a group of community choirs in Hampshire. While working for folk arts organization TAPS (Traditional Arts Project) folk musician and amateur Roger Watson started two community choirs in Hampshire (Broughton and Andover) using West Gallery style settings of folksongs, including many songs collected in Hampshire by George Gardiner. The marrying of folk song and West Gallery style was influential in reconnecting community choir singers with local folk music, and had a number of outcomes, including a series of concerts of Hampshire folk songs during the centenary of Gardiner's collecting. Watson's West Gallery style arrangements have influenced a number of arrangers (myself included) and are still used by the Andover Museum Loft Singers and in one or two other Hampshire community choirs, notably Alton Community Choir, but there is little evidence that this approach to arranging songs has spread very widely through the community choir movement. However, links between West Gallery music and community choirs do occur in terms of some overlap in membership, and of the inclusion of some items of repertoire, especially Christmas music.

2.1.3 The Natural Voice network and its influence

This network, referred to as NVPN, was founded in 1995 by singers who had studied under folk-singer Frankie Armstrong on courses run by herself and her partner Darien Pritchard (a Feldenkreis, massage and relaxation teacher). As Caroline Bithell points out,

“It is Frankie's vision that lies behind the official statements of the NVPN's aims, objectives, philosophy and working principles that appear on the organisation's website. Reading through these statements, it soon becomes clear that the concept “natural voice” refers not only to the voice itself but also to an ideology, a methodology and, to some extent, a repertory” (Bithell, 2009)

The Network has an extensive membership, and natural voice Choirs can be found in all parts of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, as well as in Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Netherlands, new Zealand, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

As the NVPN has been a powerful (arguably the most powerful) driver in the community choir movement, it is important to examine the working principles in some detail. The website has a section devoted to its own philosophy. It begins thus:

“As Natural Voice practitioners we believe that singing is our birthright. For thousands of years all over the world people have sung — to express joy, celebration and grief, to accompany work and devotion, to aid healing — without worrying about having a "good" voice or "getting it right". Song has been a part of life, a way of binding the community together. We aim to recreate the sense that vocalising, singing and singing together is natural and open to all.”(NVPN)

Immediately, we can see that here is something different from the usually accepted idea of a choir as choral society. For example, the word “music” does not occur at all in the introduction, though the word healing does. It mentions “binding a community together” as well as suggesting that “having a good voice” and “getting it right” are not of the first importance.

The NVPN philosophy states that:

“We are principally concerned with the melodic voice — the voice as it moves from speech to melody — the voice that is instinctively used in folk traditions around the world. In this culture many people see themselves as non-singers because of previous experiences of criticism and judgement. Many are excluded from singing groups if they do not have music reading skills. Therefore, in our work we aim to counteract these experiences and to give people confidence in their melodic voice by providing a supportive learning environment. We believe that vocalising, creativity and song should be accessible to all regardless of previous musical ability or experience. Therefore, creating a sense of an accepting community is an essential element of our approach in working with groups.”(Natural Voice Practitioners Network, 2011)

The emphasis is clearly on the folk tradition, on accessibility, on ways in which singing (or vocalizing) can be beneficial and therapeutic to the individual and the group. Its principles include working at a pace which does not exclude slower learners, demystifying technical language, learning songs by ear, using physical and vocal warm-ups, respecting individuals and traditions, creating a sense of community. However, this socially and musically inclusive approach does not altogether preclude the notion of skill development and of an aspiration for high standards. Item f (the last item in the list of principles) states that

“we are concerned with the enjoyment of singing and accessibility and so in our work the main focus is on the process of coming together to sing whilst at the same time developing people's vocal skills and, within the context of performance, aiming for the highest standards” (Natural Voice Practitioners Network, 2011)

Despite the inclusion of this last item, the emphasis of the Natural Voice Movement, and the ethos of its members, does appear to lean towards aspects of singing together which foster social and emotional well being rather than the more technical aspects of music making. In the next part of this exploration, I will use the NVPN approach as part of a model which seeks to define more clearly the nature of community choirs.

2.1.4 Developing a community choir model

What distinguishes a community choir from other types of choir? As a tool for researching community choirs, I found it necessary to establish a model, albeit a hypothetical model, of what might constitute a “typical” community choir, while acknowledging that in practice no one community choir is likely to match the model in every respect.

For this purpose I used the notion of the “ideal type” (attributed to Max Weber). This is not to suggest that one model is ideal in the sense of being the best or of being perfect, but rather a construct “that represents an intellectual description of a phenomenon in its abstract form” (Grix, 2004) p23. By providing the researcher with a hypothetical model, or a yardstick against which empirical evidence can be compared, it becomes possible to identify the factors or variables that are central to the problem or area of research. For my purpose, it is an aid to clarifying and understanding the factors that may constitute the defining elements of a community choir.

“An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality.” (Weber 1949:90 in Grix, 2004 p 24)

For the purpose of this exploration, I shall use the Natural Voice Principles as an “ideal type” using the term as described above.

2.1.5 Choirs in their own terms

I will now look in greater detail at the ways in which community choirs define and describe themselves, identifying common ground and basic features which relate to the “ideal type”. Unsurprisingly, as one reads the descriptions, certain themes emerge, reflecting the influence of the NVPN, though not all the choirs mentioned are led by NVPN members. These themes include, the goals, values and the musical repertoire of the choirs.

2.1.5.1 Goal – performance or participation?

The question of goal and purpose is fundamental to the understanding of what it means to be a community choir. There are differences between coming together to sing for fun, and coming together to create music for public performance. While many choir leaders and members might agree that “musical participation and experience are valuable for the processes of personal and social integration that make us whole” (Turino, 2008) p1 there are many ways and model of participating, as Turino helpfully delineates. He makes the distinction between music which is essentially about taking part (participative activity), and that which is created for the purpose of pleasing an audience (presentational activity), which is “goal directed and detail oriented” (Turino, 2008 p 53)

There is an inherent tension that arises when community choirs start to perform in public. Mills (2003) explores the idea of musical performance as ‘crux or curse of music education’ and notes that for many children, preparation for musical performance is often little more than ‘the controlled, but arid, conversion of dots and lines on a printed page into sound.’ (Mills 2003). The pervasive influence of this approach has been the downfall of many an erstwhile enthusiastic young participant in musical activity. Small refers to the destructive potential of an inappropriate focus on performance which occurs when teachers have a greater concern ‘for what people will think of their ensemble than for the real music development of their pupils’ (Small 1998: 212). Yet despite underlying anxieties and recollections of bad experiences, many choir members retain a strong desire to perform. Mills suggests that performing, along with composing and listening, is ‘one of the fundamental activities of musicians’ (Mills, 2003)

Pascale proposes an alternative “aesthetic for singing”:

“Music education has defined singing through the perspective of Western classical music that primarily values performance,

perfection and virtuosity. This view of singing is valuable and worthy of perpetuating but, I believe, has had the effect of excluding many from experiencing singing or, at the most basic level, believing they can sing. I suggest embracing a second aesthetic for singing in music education. The first is the standard or “taproot” aesthetic that has been recognised in music education since its inception in the mid 1800s. The second is an aesthetic for singing which stresses community building, diversity, group collaboration and relationship.” (Pascale, 2005)

In Pascale’s description “Aesthetic A” emphasises product and performance over process and participation, and technical skills building (in a musical context) over social values and recreation, while in “Aesthetic B” the emphasis is reversed, with no restrictions on who is considered “good enough” to sing. In practice, many community choirs would see in Pascale’s Aesthetic B a blueprint for the ethos of their own choirs. So for many community choirs, performance is a relatively small element, and when performances are given, the emphasis is on sharing what has been learned and supporting the community or a charity. The importance of the main goal (singing for fun) is such that it is often re-stated along with information about performances.

“Our main focus is on singing for the sheer pleasure of it, but we also enjoy the opportunity to perform at local community events.”
(Vocalantics)

2.1.5.2 Values and intentions

An examination of the words used by community choirs to describe themselves gives us many pointers towards a common set of values. One of the primary values appears to be inclusivity and this is an area where the community choir stands out from much of the music making that takes place in the UK. For many people, the world of practical and participative music making is one which they believe closed to them. Small refers to a process of “demusicalisation” by which individuals have been actively taught to regard themselves as unmusical (Small, 1998) p210 and describes an experiment in which individuals are encouraged to sing. When recordings of their singing was played back to them, regardless of its quality, their comment was on the lines of “Oh, but that isn’t real singing.” Small p211 In a similar vein, Turino asserts that those involved in less formal music making, (often identified as music making “just for fun”), will say ‘I’m not really a musician’, regardless of how significant a part music plays in their lives. (Turino, 2008) p25. As people compare themselves more and more with the artificially enhanced sounds they hear on recordings, so their “demusicalisation” is created

or reinforced. And as fewer people in the community sing and make music for fun, the more unnatural music-making seems to those growing up in the community, thus continuing the process.

Community choirs are to some extent a choral counter-culture or at least an alternative culture. Where the standard process for joining a more traditional choir is to audition, Community choirs are usually explicit about an open access policy, making it clear that all are welcome, and emphasizing that there is no audition. This is highly significant, as the process of auditioning (which brings with it the possibility of being rejected as “insufficiently musical”) is a major factor in keeping many adults from participation in music. Many descriptions also stress the elements of informality, fun, friendliness and sense of community. For example:

- “Langport Community Choir is a friendly group who sing for sheer enjoyment.”
(Langport Community Choir)
- “If you want a polished choir this is not for you but if you want to have fun and hopefully create a beautiful sound then come along.” (Norwich)
- “VocalAntics Community Choir welcomes singers of all abilities, ages and backgrounds regardless of their musical experience or ability. The emphasis is on the sheer joy and diversity of singing, rather than following any particular musical style. The only requisite is an open heart and a desire to sing.” (Vocalantics)
- “Hullabaloo aims to re-ignite the musical experience shared by people throughout time and all over the world, singing together for celebration, protest, passion, work and play, building and bonding the wider community with a profound impact on the individual”(Hullabaloo Community Choir)
- “Anyone is welcome to join the choir, with or without experience. There is no audition.” (Silsden Singers)
- “Bath Community Singers is a local choir where the focus is singing for the sheer pleasure of it.” (Bath Community Singers)
- “The choir is an ‘open access’ community choir, meaning that membership is available to all without audition, based on the principle that the opportunity to sing together

should be available to all, and that we all have the potential to sing competently.”

(People of Note)

- “While we are essentially apolitical, the choir has a [commitment](#) to issues relevant to the local and national community, which are concerned with equality, humanity and respect and celebrate the rich diversity of life in and around our communities”

(Manchester Community Choir, 2009)

- “We often walk together ... ending with a pub lunch and singing.” (Andover Museum Loft Singers)

Another barrier to participation is an expectation that people will be able to read music notation. Again, community choirs tend to work in a different way, making no demand for music reading skills.

- “The choir members learn all their songs by ear without the use of music, so they find they rely on each other to learn the parts together.” Worcester Volcano Choir (Vocalantics)
- “We learn songs by ear. At rehearsals, the music is taught to us line by line” (Winchester Community Choir)
- “we don't have auditions and you don't have to read music.” (Manchester Community Choir, 2009)

From the statements above it become apparent that for many of these choirs, there is a leaning towards the social aspects of singing rather than the purely musical. In some cases there is an explicit mention on websites of therapeutic aspects of the choir – for example:

- “Choir sessions should be available on the NHS- they are so therapeutic.” (Meeting Voices Community Choir, 2013).
- “People find the sessions uplifting, energising, therapeutic and highly enjoyable” (Songways Community Choir, 2013).

2.1.5.3 Repertoire

To a large extent, the values of the choirs (inclusivity, fun, friendliness, accessibility) dictate the kind of music that is sung. In order to be inclusive, learning by ear, rather than by sight-reading music, is the main process. For those who are not literate in music notation, this comes as a great relief, though for those who are used to working from a score, the idea of working without one can cause initial alarm. I have had a number of instances of choir members who have pleaded to be given written music because they find learning by ear too difficult. Most people respond to the explanation that once you have learned the piece by ear, you can sing it anywhere – you “own” the music in a completely different way. Learning orally involves the time-honoured process of listening and repetition. Working from written notation is often a much faster process but only for those who have the requisite music-reading skills. However, as Ong (1982) points out, written works demand and encourage abstract thought and objectivity, creating a personal disengagement which “separates the knower from the known” (Ong, 1982) p44. In contrast, in an oral culture the process of learning and knowing “means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known (Havelock 1963 in Ong 1982), pp.145-6. These differences in knowing relate to song and music in a similar way.

However, if people are going to learn songs by ear rather than from music notation, a somewhat different repertoire is called for. Music must be broken down into short lines and phrases which can be memorized, and then repeated until the singers are secure and confident. To do this with two or three harmony parts can be an extremely time consuming process and there is a risk of singers getting bored. Understandably, then, to aid accessibility, many community choirs choose to sing songs which come from an oral tradition, which contain elements of repetition, and which are harmonically pleasing without too much elaboration. Choir leader Chris Rowbury describes his criteria for “easy songs” as

- a tune without too many notes and a melody that doesn’t jump about too much with big intervals between notes
 - lyrics that don’t have too many words
 - simple and obvious harmonies, or no harmonies at all
 - a range of notes that is comfortable for everyone
 - straightforward rhythms (1, 2, 3, 4 or waltz time)
 - a melody that is memorable (not an easy concept to pin down!)
- (Rowbury, 2012)

Here is how some choirs describe their material:

“Our repertoire is very eclectic - traditional folk tunes, world music, rounds, gospel, shanties - "whatever!"” (Tynedale Community Choir)

“We sing a huge array of songs and genres, from Baroque to Balkan, doo-wop to hip-hop, folk to funk and Eno to Elbow! We also sing songs from all over the world; songs of protest, passion and celebration, songs to make you laugh and cry.” (Hullabaloo)

“We sing unaccompanied harmony arrangements of folk music. Much of it local but some from other countries and continents.” (Andover Museum Loft singers)

2.1.6 A choral continuum

One of the ways of understanding what is different or special about the NVPN model of a choir, is to compare it with choirs of other types and study the differences. In order to facilitate this, I have taken an additional benchmark from a choir which appears to have a very different set of expectations, standards and values.

The Bach Choir is an amateur choir described by the Evening Standard as “probably the finest independent choir in the world”. I would like to emphasise at this point that I am not privileging one approach or set of values (though others may do so), but demonstrating that in the world of choirs there is a continuum, one end of which is represented here with the “Natural Voice” model, the other with the Bach Choir. Using these two examples as benchmarks, I will create a model of the “choir continuum” which I will later use as a means of further clarifying what is meant by the term “community choir”

In contrast to the NVPN statements shown above, the Bach Choir’s self-portrayal conjures up for us a completely different concept of a choir. There is a focus on prestigious concerts, musical discipline and technical excellence, and this combination of factors generates an aura of exclusivity. The very name Bach Choir immediately tells us that we are firmly in the realm of Western classical music. The description of the choir cites a number of well known classical musicians who have been musical directors, and goes on to refer to the high standards of the choir.

“Now in its 135th season, The Bach Choir has long been established as one of the world's leading choruses. A succession of eminent musical directors, including Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, Dr Ralph Vaughan Williams, Sir David Willcocks and now David Hill, has each


Context statement – Sarah Morgan

ensured that the Choir performs to the highest standards; excellence which has resulted in invitations to sing in prestigious venues, and with the very best professional orchestras and soloists.”

In contrast to the inclusivity of the NVPN philosophy, it is clear that not everyone would be eligible to join the Bach Choir – only the most skilled in the technicalities of music can qualify, and (as the final paragraph indicates), even those will be re-tested every three years.

“In order to join, it is necessary to pass an audition and members are re-auditioned every three years. We hold auditions at various times throughout the year. An audition consists of scales or arpeggios, various musical tests and sight reading which needs to be of a good standard in order to cope with the amount of music we sing in a year.
” (Bach Choir (Bach Choir, 2008)


In creating the “choral continuum”; it appears to me that at one end (the NVPN approach) the music serves the people, by providing a source of joy and emotional energy which has a beneficial effect on individuals and on the group, and which provides a means of binding people together. At the other end (the Bach choir approach) the people serve the music, and willingly experience tests and high levels of demand in order to experience the joy of producing music to match exacting standards. Both types of choir can provide very positive musical and social experiences for members, and it is important to be clear that in making these distinctions I am not suggesting that any one way is superior to another, simply establishing differences. Having established the concept of this continuum, it becomes easier to place choirs at points along it, regardless of whether they use the term “community choir”, or not. Here below is the choir continuum in table form, followed by two examples of choirs plotted against this model. The first is one of my own choirs, the second is a choir that uses the description “Community Choir” in its title, but as I will show, appears to be very different from the Natural Voice model.

NVPN model		Bach Choir model
A. Goal - Singing for fun		Goal – concert performance
B. Entry-open to all		Entry – by audition
C. Learning by ear		High level of sight reading
D. Repertoire mainly Folk songs from many traditions		Repertoire mainly western Classical
E. Usually a-capella		Include accompaniment (keyboard to orchestra)

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F. Authenticity lies in values of choir members and leader		Authenticity lies in the score
G. Emphasis on therapeutic value		Emphasis on skills
H. Alternative or counter-culture.		Dominant culture
I. Leader as facilitator – democratic approach		Leader as dictator – authoritative approach
J. Overt intention -Social or political		Overt intention - Musical

Example 1: Winchester Community Choir

NVPN model		Bach Choir model
A. Goal - Singing for fun	*	Goal – concert performance
B. Entry-open to all	*	Entry – by audition
C. Learning by ear	*	High level of sight reading
D. Repertoire mainly Folk songs from many traditions	*	Repertoire mainly western Classical
E. Usually a-capella	*	Include accompaniment (keyboard to orchestra)
F. Authenticity lies in values of choir members and leader	*	Authenticity lies in the score
G. Emphasis on therapeutic value	*	Emphasis on skills
H. 'Alternative' culture	*	Dominant culture
I. Leader as facilitator – democratic approach	*	Leader as dictator – authoritative approach
J. Overt intention -Social or political	*	Overt intention - Musical

Comment taken from the Choir's website and my own reflection, which provide evidence for this table:

A – At least one “formal” concert and other less formal performances

B – Non auditioning choir

C – Music very occasionally given out (in one case because piece was very long and in another, music given out by guest leaders)

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

D – Extensive use of folk based material

E – A-capella choir


F – Attention to values and ethos of choir and also given to authenticity of performance, trying to keep music true to its “roots”

G - Therapeutic value of singing clearly acknowledged, but skills development encouraged as well.

J – Awareness of social and musical values – both have a place in our choir.

Example 2: Wirral Community Choir

<http://www.wirralcommunitychoir.com/index.html> accessed 6/2/2011

NVPN model		Bach Choir model
A. Goal - Singing for fun	*	Goal – concert performance
B. Entry-open to all	*	Entry – by audition
C. Learning by ear	*	High level of sight reading
D. Repertoire mainly Folk songs from many traditions	*	Repertoire mainly western Classical
E. Usually a-capella	*	Include accompaniment (keyboard to orchestra)
F. Authenticity lies in values of choir members and leader	*	Authenticity lies in the score
G. Emphasis on therapeutic value	*	Emphasis on skills
H. ‘Alternative’ culture	Insufficient evidence	Dominant culture
I. Leader as facilitator – democratic approach	Insufficient evidence	Leader as dictator – authoritative approach
J. Overt intention -Social or political	*	Overt intention - Musical

Evidence from website:

A “With a growing reputation for excellence, we usually give 5-6 concerts a year, performing in a variety of venues on the Wirral Peninsula, in Liverpool, and across Merseyside, for example:

St. George's Hall, Liverpool, Wallasey Town Hall, the Pacific Road Arts Centre, Birkenhead, the Floral Pavilion, New Brighton, the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool as well as selected churches on the Wirral.”

B “Can you sing in tune and do you have a reasonable singing voice? If the answer is yes, arrange to come along to one of our rehearsals to see if you like us! Our Musical Director will listen to your voice (on your own) and decide what voice part is best for you: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, or Bass. After this you can join - provided there is no waiting list for your particular voice part.”

C “Must you be able to read music? No, but if you can, this will be a bonus.”

D “We sing all kinds of music from ballads and show songs, to pop and classical, including an opera chorus or two.” List of repertoire includes: Aida Grand March, Anvil Chorus, Carmina Burana, Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, Vivaldi's Gloria

E Website mentions choir accompanist and assistant accompanist.

G “Alan has been associated with the Wirral Community Choir since 2007. A valued member of the Wirral Community Choir team, he regularly teaches the choir some elements of musical theory” In 2006 Graham Connolly formed the choir from an adult evening class called Develop Your Singing.”

2.1.7 In conclusion

It is clear from the example above that the term ‘community choir’ means very different things to different people. A member of the Winchester Community Choir might not feel at home in Wirral Community Choir, despite the name, and vice versa. The model of the choir continuum allows for a clearer picture of what it is that so called community choirs do, and what is it that underpins their activities. The philosophy and values of the Natural Voice Model certainly inform many community choirs, whether or not those choirs are actually linked to the Natural Voice Network. Although there are clearly some choirs who use the term Community Choir for something rather different (e.g. a classical choir which draws its members from the locality) they appear to be in the minority.

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It would seem that community choirs by and large provide a real and valued attempt to create a different choral genre. The idea of the “traditional” choir as one which is exclusive, selective, formal and values a high degree of technical skill in music may be stereotypical, but it does have a strong foundation in practice, and the tremendous popularity of community choirs may well indicate the large numbers of “musically disenfranchised” people whose desire to give voice has not found a welcome in our previously existing choirs and choral societies. That is not to decry music excellence and technical skill, nor to under-rate the cultural richness provided by our history of choral singing. The community choir model simply provides something different – not “better than”, but certainly not “the same as”.

3 Leadership and influence

In this chapter I will look at my role as a choir leader, and at my contributions to the wider community choir world. In 3.1 I will look briefly at some models of leadership and management and how they relate to the world of music and choirs, and suggest an alternative model for the community choir leader, as well as indicating ways in which this model might be used for development purposes. In 3.2 I examine my choir leadership, using feedback from a variety of sources, and by means of analysis of a recording of a choir rehearsal (item ... in portfolio) and also refer briefly to give examples of how I initiated a number of choirs and singing groups. In 3.3 I turn to the training and development of new choir leaders, and give an account of the course I have developed for ‘songleaders’, together with some of the outcomes of the course (57, 67). In 3.4 I describe some additional aspects of my contribution to the community choir scene at a county and national level, by means of various projects including a community choirs festival (49), a national conference (50), and training events (56, 58), some of which are described in greater detail in chapter 4.

3.5 contains conclusions drawn from my reflections on the above activities and analyses.

3.1 Paradigms of leadership and conducting

In Chapter 2 I introduced the notion of the choir continuum and the different values pertaining to different types of choir. I now turn to the leadership of these choirs, and, in particular, to the leadership of community choirs.

3.1.1 Models of leadership

Those concerned with developing leadership or management skills in the commercial or public sector have a wealth of models and concepts available to them. Examples such as the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid (1964), Hershey and Blanchard’s (1988) situational leadership theory, Adair’s (1983) Action-Centred Leadership, Bass’s (1990) concept of Transactional or transformational leadership, Dulewicz and Higgs (2003) three leadership styles, all have their adherents and critics, but contribute to a discourse of leadership that enables current and aspiring leaders to reflect on their performance and to consider different ways of carrying out their role – the existence of the discourse makes leadership something that can be discussed

and analysed, and provides people with benchmarks against which to judge their own performance and to undertake further development.

3.1.2 Models of music leadership

In terms of music leadership, there are fewer models available. We have the image of the music teacher, or the choral conductor, and more recently we can add to the mix the philosophies of the Natural Voice Practitioners Network; all of these can and do inform the role of the community choir leader. One paradigm of music leadership that is firmly based in the Western Classical tradition is well illustrated in The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) syllabus for The Music Direction diplomas. The syllabus includes venue and rehearsal organization, compiling a programme, rehearsing repertoire, putting on a performance and arranging material for your choir. As a prerequisite for the lowest grade of diploma, candidates are expected to hold ABRSM Grade 8 practical as a “required minimum level of competence”. The repertoire for Choir (mixed voices) includes works by Britten, Bruckner, Elgar, Gibbons, Handel, Ireland, Morley, Palestrina, Purcell and Tallis. The preparation guidance indicates that the examiners will be looking at

evidence of your technical command – not just your use of gesture but your ability to choose, control and indicate tempo, phrasing, balance, dynamics and timbre.

aural skill in recognizing and responding to intonation and balance problems or reading errors within the ensemble will be assessed
understanding of technical problems facing individual members of your ensemble be scrutinized.

Additionally, your rapport with the ensemble and its response to you will be taken into account. (ABRSM 2013)

It is interesting to note that rapport with the ensemble is last on the list and “will be taken into account” rather than “assessed” or “scrutinized”! In this (predominantly classical) paradigm “Conductor training is limited mainly to the artistic or musical aspect of leading” (Boerner et al. 2004 p.476).

Turning now to leadership models in community music, Mullen (2008) describes his adaptation of a “facilitraining rainbow” (Townsend and Donovan 1999). For Mullen, this “begins with the leader at the centre of communications and activity and moves through stages to the eventual abdication of the leader and the self-sustainability of the group”. However as Deane et al (2013) point out, many community choirs are not focused on social change and community

action, and I suggest that most community choir leaders, far from seeing their main aim as being able to abdicate from their role, seek to sustain a long term relationship with their singing group. Having said that, Mullen's model is helpful in showing a continuum of leadership styles, and the concept of being able to move elegantly between different styles is an important one. Heron (1989) describes different modes of facilitation, indicating that the skilful facilitator will move between being directive and working cooperatively or offering opportunities for autonomy, as the situation demands. It is important to realize that there are choices to be made, and that these are all potentially valid. My experience of working with new community choir leaders indicates that many of them are very reluctant to adopt a directive role. Yet avoiding a directive role at all costs does not necessarily solve any problems; indeed it can create them. In a report on community choirs in disadvantaged areas, Deane et al (2013) refer to a suggestion that being too democratic was a cause for some difficulties within newly formed community choirs. One of the leaders puts forward a view that: "Maybe what you need is someone who will take a more rigid approach, telling people what to do, and presenting them with the sort of thing that they are expecting" (Ibid p 19). The conflation of directive behaviour with rigidity, is belief that can only make life more difficult and confusing for the choir leader as they feel that being authoritative is never an appropriate behavioural choice. Mullen (2008) also notes that "the community musician often behaves as though he/she were nothing more than a (usually very enthusiastic) member of the group, takes no part in challenging the prevailing mindset and absolutely avoids any sense of teaching." He suggests that this attitude can lead to a form of abdication or laissez-faire leadership, which is unhelpful to the group. I would argue, therefore, that there is a clear need for a model which allows community choir leaders to engage with and explore the range of options and approaches open to them, and that only by this engagement, by subsequent practice and reflection, will they develop the seemingly instinctive and flexible response that marks out the skilled professional.

3.1.3 Developing a model of community choir leadership

Below, I suggest a dynamic model of community choir leadership. The purpose of this model is to enable existing or aspiring community choir leaders (through a process of coaching or peer to peer discussion) to explore some of the many facets of choir leadership, to consider their own strengths and preferences, to clarify their personal vision of what it means to be a

community choir leader and to help them identify areas in which they might wish to expand or develop their skills to a greater extent.

I highlight the centrality of discussion in this process; as part of my work in training and development I was, until quite recently, responsible for administering psychometric profiles to trainee leaders, and giving them feedback about their results. Experience in this area has taught me that even with the most robust of instruments, the value lies “in the individual discussion of the profiles, which should always be a two-way process and give the coachee ample room to share their experiences” (McDowell and Kurz, 2007 p.301). While I make no claim for this model as a scientific instrument, I believe it has its place as a developmental tool.

I acknowledge the influence of several management and leadership models, but in particular, the Blake-Mouton Managerial grid, James and Arroba’s (2005) Reading and Carrying model of political behaviour, and the Inspirational Leadership model (Olivier 2001). Blake and Mouton propose two dimensions, focus on task and focus on people to create four different management styles. Oliver’s model also involves four different styles based on order, action, nurture and change (Oliver 2001 p52). James and Arroba’s model “provides a bridge between the more accessible and rational aspects of organisation life and the hidden aspects of organisational dynamics.”

I also draw on Turino’s (2008) analyses of the politics of musical participation, particularly the differences of approach between music for performance (presentational) and music for participation, and acknowledge the insights provided by Mullen, Deane and others as shown above.

3.1.4 The Four Facet Model

My *Facets of Choir Leading* model involves two dimensions. There are a number of dimensions I could have chosen, but these seem the most helpful to me. The ‘focus’ dimension runs from focus on the organization (community/group) to focus on the music; at one extreme music might be a means to an end; at the other, music is an end in itself. The other dimension looks at an ethos which relates to a drive towards participation or performance. Following the example of the 4-quadrant model used by Olivier as well as James and Arroba, I have used these dimensions to create four different choir leader styles, and for accessibility I have given each one a name. However, I note, and strongly echo, the caveat mentioned in James and

Arroba, that the creation of this kind of model can lead to a simplistic notion of leaders fitting into one particular style or another, when in reality, the model needs to be seen as dynamic; the skillful leader will draw on aspects of all four quadrants at different times in response to different situations. “All human beings have access to all four characters. Each individual will, however, have preferences about the characters they play. Just as an actor may prefer a certain type of part...we will also have a preference for the roles we play as leaders” (Olivier 2001 p53). My personal observation and experience of choir leaders over a number of years indicates that although they undoubtedly move between the four positions in the model, the ways in which they do this will vary from one individual to another according to preference. I hope to explore and illuminate these preferences by using the model with trainee choir leaders as well as for my own development.

The four quadrants have been given names to express different strengths and preferences. The top left quadrant is where a musical focus connects with a desire to perform. I call this quadrant **The Conductor** as it is nearest to the ABRSM model, and possibly corresponds with the popular stereotype of the conductor. When in this position, the leader is paying attention to activity – shaping new performances or ever higher levels of excellence. Diagonally opposite is **The Catalyst** who like the conductor is action oriented but who has a purpose beyond the purely musical. Bottom left is **The Organiser**, who pays attention to maintaining system and order, with strengths in the area of administration and management. The top right hand quadrant, where the focus on music meets values about participation I have called (for want of a more appropriate name) **The Muse**, who is concerned with the long term well-being of the musical group.

Both the diagonally opposite positions have in common a desire to create stability, as the right hand positions reflect a desire to create change. The top two positions are both primarily concerned with music, the lower two with the organization or community. The right hand roles are also linked, as both the Muse and the Catalyst positions demand a high level of empathy and interpersonal and influencing skills, while those of the Conductor and Organiser involve close attention to detail and technicality.

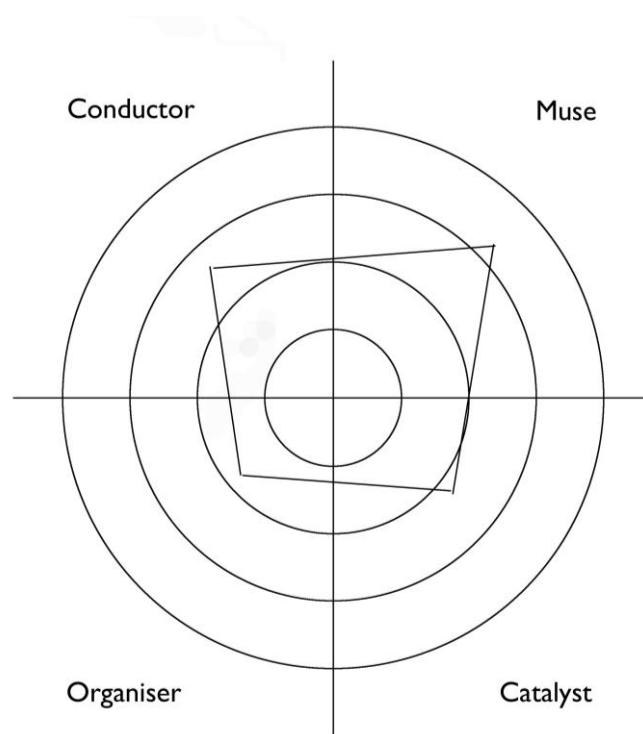
In the diagram below I have indicated some of the characteristics of each preference.

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

<div> <div>Performance</div> <div>Ethos</div> <div>Participation</div> <div>←</div> <div>→</div> </div>		
Conductor Musically demanding Authoritative Provides musical challenges High level of musical theory Skilled use of gesture Classical music prominent in repertoire Formal musical education Fluent sight reader Criteria for repertoire – musical excellence Task orientation	Muse Musically enabling Persuasive Develops musical confidence Demystifies music technicality Interpersonal skills Emotional intelligence World / folk prominent in repertoire Informal musical experience Skilled in oral/aural methods Long term relationship Criteria for repertoire- uplifting and fun Process orientation	<div> <div>Music</div> <div>Focus</div> <div>Organisation / community</div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> </div>
Organizer Creates order and stability Organisational focus Attention to detail Understands the ‘business side’ ‘Backroom’ role Technical knowledge Manages and promotes events Keeps up to date with legalities – tax, insurance, copyright etc Task orientation	Catalyst Creates change Community focus Attention to big picture Understands community / group dynamics Highly visible Balances challenge and support Inclusive approach Project based Process orientation	

I have then created a pictorial representation of choir leadership preference using the four quadrants overlaid with concentric circles. This enables the user to plot how strong their leaning is towards each quadrant. The further from the centre one marks oneself, the stronger the preference.

3.2 My leadership style and values in the context of 3.1



Model shown above is an analysis of my own overall preferences.

3.2.1 Strengths and weaknesses – low preferences

Working with this profiling system has proved a helpful way to explore some of the strengths and weaknesses of my choir leadership style. The illustration above shows what I believe to be my own preferences. Many of the skills gained through my work in training and development, as a performer and as an arranger have stood me in good stead, but there are gaps in my knowledge and understanding which it would help me to work on. The two areas of the model for which I have the lowest preference are those of Catalyst and Organiser. With one of my choirs I am currently able to delegate many of the Organizer functions, while with the other choir I manage the situation by keeping everything as informal as possible and trusting in people rather than systems such as registers. My lack of attention to detail is sometimes a problem when we are making arrangements for a performance; choir members have learned to nag me for information rather than relying on me to remember to give them all the facts. However, I am conscious that this is a potential weakness and one which can be very annoying to those on the receiving end.

Though people sometimes refer to me as a community musician, I am aware that this is not accurate. I am not really a Catalyst, and I know that in truth my interest lies more in the music per se rather than in using music as either therapy or community action (though I greatly value the fact that people find coming to choir a therapeutic activity). While I would wish to support those who champion community development and social change, I know that my orientation is more towards musical and personal development. This may well make me appear, or be, less powerful or charismatic as a leader, and could lay me open to charges of being ‘middle of the road’ or maintaining the status quo, and these are criticisms which I have to take on board.

3.2.2 Strengths and weaknesses – high preferences

Looking at my strengths, I am interested both in performance and participation and I do have a drive to create and use new material and new musical activities, which points me somewhat towards the Conductor position. In a study of orchestral conductors it has been suggested that “a leadership style that is directive and – at the same time – charismatic is functional to success in the orchestra because it promotes the professional and motivational prerequisites for precise co-operation among the members of the orchestra” (Boerner et al 2004 p.466). While I would hesitate to describe myself as charismatic, I have had feedback that I have “a presence ... that holds your attention throughout” (Brown K. 2013), which I believe stems to a large extent from the assurance that comes from performing. Facilitation training has helped me feel more comfortable about being directive or hierarchical when it seems appropriate, though that has taken some time. Part of my role as choir leader is to create a culture of support and safety to balance the apprehension which many associate with singing; the ability to make decisions and act with “distress-free authority” (Heron 1989 p38) is part of creating that culture. I also have many features of the Muse; encouraging people to take part is at the heart of my work, my musical skills are derived largely through informal learning, and I have an interest in oral and aural learning and teaching. Although I enjoy preparing choirs for performance, I feel this a by-product of what we do rather than a goal.

As a leader with both Muse and Conductor preferences, I am aware that I am good at making singing highly accessible and enjoyable, and this is reinforced by feedback from others as well as from the DVD *Voices From the Choir* (53). I have recently been involved in starting a work-

based choir for a local housing association, and asked the organizer to provide me with feedback. A copy of her letter appears Testimonials (72) in the portfolio. Comments include

- very good at explaining what we should be doing [
 - Sarah has led the singing sessions at Radian brilliantly
 - In only three weeks Sarah has got a group of people singing in harmony and belting out a tune
 - She makes the whole group relaxed by her own outgoing nature
 - has a presence about her that holds your attention throughout
 - enthusiastic and very helpful.
 - breaks the work down in bite-sized chunks
 - is quick to encourage
 - Feel uplifted and energised afterwards
 - very good at going at a pace the group can handle
 - makes the sessions fun
 - provides good material
- (Brown 2013)

I see confidence building as an important part of my leadership role and aspire to be the kind of leader whose role is “facilitating the student's entire musical experience, one that extends beyond the bounds of technical knowledge and skill” Wis (2002 p 20). One of the great achievements of community choirs is that of opening up opportunities for those who may have felt excluded from the seemingly arcane world of music and as a community choir leader I find it is essential to be aware of those barriers and to make sure that I do my best to be “a doorway rather than a wall” (Wis 2002 p20).

3.2.3 Contextual leadership

I am also keen that singers should reach as high a standard as possible, and I am aware that though for most of the term I may be a Muse, when a performance is on the horizon, I become much more of a Conductor position. This I think is the riskiest aspect of my leadership as I am sometimes frustrated by my own shortcomings in terms of musical theory or the technicalities of singing. Also, while one of the positive aspects of the Conductor is a passion for excellence, a corresponding negative is impatience and an over critical approach. Under stress both of these affect me, and I sometimes have to make strenuous efforts not to get annoyed when people have not learned their notes or words a week before a concert. This happened quite recently, and I was aware that a number of singers were having difficulties with some of the music; energy levels were dropping and there was a somewhat depressed atmosphere at rehearsal. Fortunately the facilitator in me was aware of this, and I realized that it was

necessary to reduce the pressure and restore the sense of fun by explaining that A) The audience had no idea of the arrangements, so would almost certainly not be aware of anything that went wrong and B) If they sang any really clashing notes, people would just think they were singing something very modern and clever, and be impressed! I shared some stories of times when I'd made apparently awful mistakes in concerts and got away with it, and after much laughter we resumed rehearsal with much better results.

3.2.4 Values in practice – starting and maintaining choirs

I now turn to the creation of new choirs, and the success factors involved both in starting and maintaining them. Since 2000 I have worked with a number of community choirs (Hale Village Choir, Broughton Choir, Andover Museum loft Singers) and started others. Winchester Community choir was formed in 2005, Andover (33) and Petersfield in 2007, and in 2013 I ran a successful pilot scheme to start a workplace choir for Radion housing association in Eastleigh. Testimonials referring to Winchester Community Choir and the Radion choir are shown as (72) in portfolio. Considering the success factors involved in starting these ventures, I have identified the following, which have been most relevant to me.

3.2.5 Starting a new choir

3.2.5.1 Taster sessions

I start by running taster sessions, which involve no (or minimal) commitment, and wherever possible I secured funding to ensure that they would be free or low-cost. An example of a bid for funding for Andover Spotlight singers is shown as (33) in the portfolio. Keeping the cost low means that people have little to lose, and the knowledge that they are not having to sign up for something long term seems to be an encouragement to come and have a go. It is important to pre-empt people's fears about singing (will I have to sing on my own, will I be picked on, will I have to read music, and so on) and the wording of advertising material is important in order to allay those fears, and to emphasise benefits such as fun, friendship, well-being. It is in these early sessions that my values around participation and accessibility help me to build good relationships with singers. My preferred leadership style (enthusiastic and persuasive but with clear direction) works well with these newly forming groups.

3.2.5.2 *The right venue*

The Organizer aspect of leadership is my least preferred role, but it is one that I often have to take on with a new group, and venue organization (like advertising and PR above) is part of that role. I have taken great care in choosing venues, not just from the point of view of accessibility but for their sound qualities. A resonant room will make even the most timid voices sound impressive, which sets up a positive feedback loop and builds confidence.

3.2.5.3 *Confidence building - quick successes and choice of material*

Here I am back in my 'comfort leadership zone' of Muse. One of the things I had to learn about in my training role was change management, and the importance of early successes. In singing just as much as in an organizational context it is essential for the confidence of a new singing group that they have successes right from the start. If within the first ten minutes of a session they can experience the pleasure of singing in harmony, most people feel excited and motivated to continue. I have spent some years building up a repertoire of songs that are easy to learn, and fun to sing. More challenging material can be left for a time when the group is more established and secure. In a letter describing the founding and development of Winchester Community Choir, Jean Forster writes:

Sarah made us sound good even at the taster sessions by choosing rounds or exercises that even we could not deny sounded good. Also she wrote harmonies that we could tackle successfully. Even if some pieces seemed challenging at first, we could and can trust her not to let us go for a fall by tackling something too difficult. (Forster 2013)

3.2.6 Maintaining a choir

Ensuring the continuing 'good health' and vitality of a community choir is a process that demands time, attention and continuous learning. Wis (2002) suggests a number of areas; continuous musical development, managerial skills, and the development of a 'servant-leader' ethos, constantly focusing on what will be best for the choir and for all the individuals within it and seeing whatever gifts they possess as contributions "to a larger whole, much greater than themselves" (ibid p.20).

3.2.6.1 *Raising standards and changing goals*

'What is best for the choir' is something that changes over time. Both the choirs I now run started as groups that sang for fun, with an emphasis on easily accessible material. Choir leader Chris Rowbury (2012) highlights a problem with such groups, which is, that as people

improve they will want greater challenges and the goals of the group will alter. As a choir leader I can respond by introducing ever more demanding repertoire or concert schedule (pleasing the confident singers but alarming the less confident, and perhaps putting off people who wanted to join a 'singing for fun group'), or stay with the more accessible material and 'sharing events' and risk losing the more able and confident singers. I have touched on this issue in the introduction (1.6.5) and I appreciate that there will always be some people who will outgrow the choir (or whatever organization they happen to be in). It is important to me to balance two aspects: the provision of singing opportunities and confidence building musical experiences for people who may have few other sources of such things and the natural desire for growth, progress and challenge that lies not just within the choir members but also in me.

3.2.6.2 Balancing challenge and support

Csikszentmihályi (1990) established the concept of flow, the positive state achieved when we are tackling a task in which challenges posed and our perceived skills are well balanced. My response to the dilemma of managing the improving choir has focused on increasing the likelihood of "flow" experiences for choir members by providing more challenging material but also increasing support and building greater skills. In terms of skills, I now spend more time learning about and teaching techniques and warm-up activities designed to improve vocal range and intonation, and am more alert about giving feedback to the choir about the quality of sound they are making. I have also given the choirs the opportunity of performing in a number of interesting events including Space for Peace, In a Golden Coach (63), Wherwell (60) and Longparish Pageants, and the Saying Goodbye service (70) as well as local concerts. I know that one or two people do not enjoy performing in concerts, and I do not put pressure on anyone to take part in public performance, but there is a little pressure from within the group. However, the numbers participating in concerts indicates that this is by and large a popular development.

Provision of support happens in a number of ways. Last year I asked for volunteers from the Winchester choir to be 'section leaders', and we now have two people from each voice part who put in extra time learning the parts beforehand and rehearsing with me. They help by singing some of the material to the choir before I begin to teach it, so that people can get an idea of what the finished product might be like rather than trying to learn harmonies in isolation. They also help by providing strong and confident voices in each part, giving extra

security to less experienced singers. I also make a greater effort to record harmony parts so that singers can access those on CD or via the website. To date this is working well – the choir has tackled several more complex pieces and performed them successfully, and this has raised morale considerably. It has also taxed my musical resources and improved my sight-reading, adding to my continuing musical development.

3.3 Training new leaders

3.3.1 Why now and why me?

During the time I have been running community choirs, I have been aware that there is not a great deal of relevant training for leaders. Evaluations from a conference for choir leaders which I initiated (*Out of this World 2011*) described below (50) contained a number of requests from more training. On reflection, I felt that I genuinely had something to offer new and aspiring choir leaders; I could contribute an unusually strong mix of skills, combining experience of singing in public, working as a professional facilitator, and leading choirs and song workshops. I invited my singing partner Carolyn Robson to work with me in designing and delivering a one-day training event (in association with the Centre for Research into the Arts as Well Being) at the University of Winchester (57). That proved successful, and many of those participating requested a further event which would cover topics in more depth. I therefore decided to develop a new package, the Songleaders course (67).

Looking at course availability for this particular group, I was able to identify a few one-day courses, and a highly respected week-long residential course run by Frankie Armstrong. I explored with a number of would-be-participants the factors that would make it easier or harder for them to attend, and found that for many the cost and time commitments of a residential ruled out that type of course. I therefore developed a format of five one-day sessions, all at weekends, with sufficient space in between for participants to try out what they had learned, to observe other leaders, and to do their own background research. The course ran from January to May 2013; course details, handouts and evaluation summary are shown as item.... in portfolio.

3.3.2 Conceptual framework and principles

Having been given significant opportunity (through University assignments) to reflect on my own learning and practice, I had a greater clarity about the principles on which I wanted to

base the training, particularly some of those of cognitive apprenticeship suggested by Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) in McLellan (1996) and discussed above in relation to my own development as a trainer (see Chapter 2). Leading a community choir is a complex task, utilising (when done well) a wide range of interpersonal and facilitation skills, as well as musical skills, and not all of those are in the conscious domain. Brown, Collins, Duguid (ibid p39) refer to the process of making tacit knowledge explicit, a process I have in the past tried to build into trainer-training events. Most if not all the participants would, I was aware, already be part of the community choir sub-culture, and would have access to a range of role models. The cognitive apprenticeship paradigm sat comfortably within my own values about learning and development, and gave me an important extra dimension in terms of theoretical underpinning for this new role of developing choir leaders.

I was keen that the course should have at its core a strong element of practical work; teaching practice and feedback. By making this the main pillar of the edifice, I felt that people would gain in confidence in their own teaching ability, and develop not only new skills in leading workshops and teaching songs, but also gain valuable experience in how to give feedback effectively. To that end, I kept the group to a relatively small size (10 participants) to maximize the opportunities for teaching. The format I used for feedback is one that I encountered while working with the Springboard Women's Development training programme, and which I felt was both rigorous and positive. The process works as follows: after each participant has taught their session, they then comment on one thing they did well, and one thing which they would like to improve or do differently. They then receive feedback from each member of the group in turn- group members are asked to mention (first) something they think might be improved, and (second) something they liked or which worked well. In this way, the participant always ends with positive feedback. By limiting comments to one thing (and I did have to be strict) it encouraged people to be specific, and avoided individuals being overwhelmed with information.

At the beginning of the course, I gave a short talk about the value and principles of constructive feedback, and I also gave feedback at the end of each teaching session, doing my best to model a constructive approach. I was greatly impressed at how effectively the group members used the feedback mechanism throughout the sessions. Indeed, when on one occasion I attempted to cut the process short to save time, it was made very clear to me that it

was far too important to lose! The ability to critique in a constructive way, and to accept such critique set the tone for working and learning together in a way that gave a good balance of support and challenge, and laid firm foundations for a collaborative working relationship.

3.3.3 Teaching methods

Teaching methods (as in the cognitive apprenticeship model) were designed to help participants “observe, engage in and invent or discover expert strategies in context.” (Collins, Brown, Holum 1991 p13). I gave a relatively small amount of theoretical input, and this was always linked to a specific aspect of practical choir leadership. For example, we touched on some theories about different learning styles, in order to help students understand the differing needs of choir members for pace, change of activity, security, repetition and so on, to encourage students to adopt greater flexibility in their approach rather than simply teaching in the way they preferred to learn. My input was usually linked to issues arising from teaching practice – anything from “How do you establish the best pitch for a song?” (resulting in some input on vocal ranges and tessitura) to “What do you do when people talk while you are trying to teach” (resulting in discussions about group dynamics and facilitation skills) and much more beside. I gave a small amount of demonstration by teaching the occasional song or warm-up exercise, and I also invited a guest tutor (Carolyn Robson) who gave a master class, demonstrating how to improve vocal technique in the process of teaching a song.

3.3.4 Contents

The topics covered included

- analysis of the role of the choir leader,
- aspects of learning styles and how to apply those to the choir context,
- what makes a song easy or hard to learn,
- where to find appropriate repertoire,
- how to prepare to teach a new song,
- vocal skills and technique,
- use of warm-ups,
- practicalities of starting a choir (including legal issues),
- concert organization,
- working with a committee,
- maintaining momentum for the future.

Students also made a visit to observe another choir leader (I contacted a range of leaders who I felt would be excellent role models, and provided a list from which the students could choose). In addition of course, there was the practical teaching of warm-up exercises, opening and closing songs, rounds and more, in each case followed by feedback as described above.

3.3.5 Evaluation and Outcomes

One noticeable outcome was the growth in confidence and assuredness displayed by almost all the participants during the course. This showed itself through more positive body language and non-verbal communication as well as in clarity and warmth of spoken communication. We had some discussion during the course about “being directive”, and about how failure to give direction can be damaging in some group situations, especially with a new or unconfident group. I gave a very brief introduction to the modes of facilitation described in Heron (1989). It was interesting to observe that as the course progressed, participants demonstrated more confidence in taking control and giving direction, where they judged that was likely to give a more positive outcome for the particular activity they were doing. Teaching skills were honed, and the awareness of the need for really thorough preparation led to noticeably better results as we moved towards the final session. Networking was another beneficial result, and the course members now have their own Facebook page to facilitate networking in the future, as well as making plans for a follow-up or reunion meeting in a few months time. I suggested that we might put in place an informal mentoring scheme, and this idea was received with eagerness by a number of participants. I am currently working on this with one of the group members, who is setting up just such a scheme for yoga teachers, but in the meantime, participants are already seeking mentors and also offering each other support in developing and enhancing their skills.

It is clear that doing the course has made participants more willing to put themselves forward or seek opportunities to use their skills. Here are some of the course outcomes .

- P and A (who were members of the same choir) have set up a “summer choir” during the period when the regular choir normally takes a break..
- A has worked with me to set up a new workplace choir for a housing association, and is now running the choir, following the successful pilot scheme.
- F has moved to a new area and has set up her own community choir

- Y is now deputizing for several local choirs, and has approached a local school with a view to starting a children's choir. She has been asked to take over a choir when the regular leader goes to college and has the confidence to accept the role.
- M is working with me to develop a choir mentoring scheme.
- J has offered to share her skills in music reading and theory, and will be coaching some of the participants.

In the light of the very positive evaluations, dates have now been set for a second course in 2014. The design and development of the course has been a significant step for me in a number of ways. It has enabled me to bring together my choir leader experience with my training and development background in a way (it appears) has been positive for course participants. I have been able to revisit and adapt material used on management courses, and demonstrate how aspects of theory such as learning or facilitation styles and group dynamics can enrich and inform the practice of the choir leader. It has also caused me to confront some of the concerns about not being a 'real musician' that I described in the introductory chapter. The course participants clearly regarded me as a skilful musician and teacher, and this helped me to look, not just as I usually do, at how far I have to go, but at how far I have come. As a developer of people I know the importance of this, but it is easy to forget to do such things for oneself. I summed it up in an article for the NVPN "they say that when the pupil is ready the teacher will appear, and I've been lucky in have ten people from whom I have gained a lot over the last few months" (Morgan 2013 p.2).

3.4 Making an impact on the wider scene

Part of my impact and influence as a choir leader has involved activities beyond the bounds of my own choirs. In the past few years I have undertaken or initiated a number of events include a Community Choirs Festival (3.4.1), a national conference (4.3), and training in song arrangement for choir leaders (4.4). I have also developed training for new and aspiring choir leaders, which is described above.

3.4.1 Hampshire Community Choirs festival

Hampshire is a county rich in choirs and with a number of community choirs as well as more formal or traditional choirs. In 2010 I convened a small group of Winchester Community Choir

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

members to discuss running a community choir festival (49), that would bring together as many singers as possible for a day of workshops and performances, and would provide a chance for networking between like-minded people. One member of the group was tasked with drawing up a list of choirs to invite. Our criteria were simple, participating choirs must be non-auditioning, and be prepared to spend the day learning by ear and singing without accompaniment. An initial internet search identified around 60 choirs, and an examination of their website descriptions for mentions of audition reduced the list to 27 choirs, who we contacted by email, informing them of the event and asking for expressions of interest. We eventually arrived at a list of 13 participating choirs (listed below, with participant numbers) from a number of different areas in the county.

Choir	Numbers
AChaired Taste (Horndean)	57
Allunde (Southsea)	10
Alton Community Choir	31
Andover Museum Loft Singers	15
Andover Spotlight Singers	19
Blue Sky (Southampton)	22
Petersfield Community Choir	37
Sing Winchester	19
Sing at the Hilt (Chandlers Ford)	9
Singing Together (Portsmouth)	10
Sounds Lively (Isle of Wight)	18
Phoenix Community Choir (Bordon)	3
Westy Community Choir (Aldershot)	29
Winchester Community Choir	53
Totals	332

The festival day consisted of a series of workshops delivered by leaders who I selected to provide a balance of musical styles and strengths, including British folk song, world music, classical and opera singing. We also had sessions on care of the voice and vocal technique.

After the event, our team reviewed our performance and discussed what we had learned in the course of running the festival. These learning points, a spreadsheet summarizing the evaluations, and other material relating to the event is included as item in the portfolio. This event was important for the choir; hosting it was a complex task involving many choir members, and some who do not shine vocally were star performers in helping with the organization. I had not thought of the festival as a team-building event, but it did act as one to

a certain extent. Paradoxically, networking with other choirs and listening to them in action had the effect of bringing the choir members closer together and giving them a great sense of pride in 'our choir' and what 'we' have achieved.

3.5 Conclusions

The process of exploring and assessing my role as a choir leader and my impact on the community choir world has been an illuminating one. In the past, when I was involved in training women managers, I became aware that many were reluctant to own or acknowledge their power and influence (perhaps from a fear of being labelled 'bossy' or worse), and I have been intrigued to find myself exhibiting similar characteristics. Running the choir leaders course pushed me into finding a point of balance between the desire of some course participants to cast me in the role of 'the expert' and my own reluctance to take on that role. It also encouraged me to analyse and deconstruct aspects of my own teaching, unpacking areas of 'unconscious competence' and bringing them forward into the conscious arena, in order to be able to explain things more clearly. Allowing one of the participants to observe me taking a choir rehearsal has also given me useful feedback, encouraged me to re-examine what I do, and affirmed that what I have been teaching is borne out in my practice.

Developing and working with a leadership model for community choirs has meant considerable reflection on my role as a choir leader, my relationship with choir members, and indeed my concept of myself as a musician. There are many areas in which I need to develop further – for example, knowledge of music theory and music software will improve the way in which I write and set out arrangements, and I should perhaps step outside my comfort zone with the genres of music that I teach. I am also aware that occasional failure to set adequate boundaries for myself results in significant time pressure for me, and puts demands on my patience. Having said that, I also remind myself that learning is a process of long-term transformation:

part of an inevitably unfinished, but continuous process that goes on throughout life. Each event, circumstance, or interaction is not discrete... Instead, it is a little like the addition of color to color in a painting, where the color that is added becomes inseparably a part of the color that was there before and both are transformed in the process. (Brown and Duguid 1992)

4 Folk-songs for choirs

In this chapter, I take up the theme of English folk-song and its place in the community choir repertoire. In an attempt to clarify some of the repertoire choices made by community choir leaders, I explore attitudes towards English folk-song, and trace some of the shifts in perception that have taken place since the work of the Victorian collectors (4.1). In 4.2 I examine briefly the changing role of folk-song in the choral repertoire both for adults and for children. I turn, in 4.3, to the repertoire of community choirs and the prevalence of world music in these repertoires. In 4.4 I give an account of work I have done to challenge the ‘dominant culture’ of world music in the community choir arena, using two examples, a conference and a training course. I then describe my own approach to arranging folk-songs for community choirs (4.5) and in 4.6 I describe innovative ways in which I have presented folk-music to choirs and audiences who may not previously have engaged with that genre of music.

4.1 Folk-song in and out of favour

In exploring the place English folk-song as part of choir repertoire, it is necessary to trace (albeit briefly) society’s relationship with folk-music and its rises and falls in popularity. In exploring the ways in which people have analysed and written about English folksong and the ‘folk scene’, I am aware that this is a world which I inhabit for much of my working life, so (as will be clear from the introduction to this submission) I am far from being a neutral observer. Ian McGilchrist in “The Master and His Emissary” suggests that:

To attempt to detach oneself entirely is just to bring a special kind of attention to bear which will have important consequences for what we find. Similarly we cannot see something without there being a context, even if the context appears to be that of “no context”, a thing ripped free of its moorings in the lived world, that is just a special, highly value-laden kind of context in itself, and it certainly alters what we find, too. (McGilchrist, 2009 p. 29)

With that caveat, I now consider ways in which perceptions of English folk song (to some extent paralleling ideas of Englishness as an identity) have developed and changed over time.

4.1.1 The rise, fall and resurrection of Cecil Sharp

I take as a starting point, the work of the collector Cecil Sharp (1859-1924), arguably the most significant and influential figure of what is often referred to as the first folk revival. (There was

a second revival which began in the 1950s). In an episode which has now attained almost mythic status, Sharp's love affair with English folk song began with a visit to his friend, the reverend Charles Marson, in the village of Hambridge in Devon. Marson's gardener (appropriately named John England) stepped out from behind a bush, singing "The Seeds of Love". Sharp allegedly whipped out his notebook and took down his first folk-song. Over the course of his lifetime, he was to collect nearly 5,000 tunes of songs, dances, children's games and more.

Although this was by no means the start of folk-song collecting, it was the start of a process which for a time at least seemed set fair to embed folksong into the nation's culture and consciousness. Although only one of many collectors at this time, he was so central to the folk revival that his role and reputation are also central to an English understanding of folk-song. I hold that the story of Sharp's reputation, his demotion from folk hero to villain, and his gradual reinstatement in the folk hierarchy can be seen to some extent as a mirror of attitudes of the English public to its indigenous music.

Sharp has been described as

an early exponent of 'applied ethnomusicology', advocating the use of folk song at many levels in national life, returning folk culture to the people through many methods from primary education to the invention of an authentic English repertory of classical music based on folk idioms (Myers, 1992 p.135).

In the late 19th and early 20th century, folk music was seen by many (including composers such as Butterworth, Holst and Vaughan Williams) as excellent material for a musical revival: something uniquely English (and certainly not German), which would speak to the hearts and minds of a nation in need of inspiration. Sharp promoted the belief that folk-songs were a unique genre of music, representing something uniquely English, saying something important about our past, and therefore having a bearing on and making a contribution to our present and future. His influence was prodigious and long lasting.

In 1907 Cecil Sharp published 'English Folk Song: Some Conclusions' the first book in English about folk music as a branch of the art of music, as church music, opera and chamber music are departments of the art. And it remained for half a century the only book of substance (Howes 1969 p. xi)

However opinions about Sharp's work become increasingly controversial in more recent years, and perceptions of him changed from that of "a charming eccentric cycling around Somerset knocking on people's doors persuading old ladies to sing him their lovely old songs so he could save them from extinction" (Irwin 2011) to "a controlling manipulator who presented a false idyll of rural England by excluding anything that didn't fit his agenda, moulding himself as an untouchable icon of the folk-song movement in the process"(Irwin, 2011).

By the 1970s new models of ethnomusicology were being developed and "Sharp's theories of an ideal 'folk' were silently ushered from scholarly practice to the history of ethnomusicology" (Myers 1992 p.138). The folk revival as a social, cultural or political phenomenon had escaped academic interest and scrutiny for a long time, but then a number of influential works mounted strong attacks on the work of Sharp and the early collectors.

Publications by Harker including *Cecil Sharp in Somerset: Some Conclusions* (Harker, 1972) and *Fakesong* (Harker, 1985) were highly critical of Sharp. In "a masterly account of "folk" song mediation." (Pickering and Green 1987 p.13) Harker concluded that Sharp had gravely misrepresented the culture and music of the working people from whom he collected and was guilty of mediation but also expropriation (Boyes 1993, p.58).

The Imagined Village - Culture, ideology and the English Folk Revival (Boyes 1993) was hailed as a significant and important work by reviewers from both the academic world and the world of folk music. "an important and thought-provoking book, a standard by which future studies will be judged, raising issues which those future studies must address." (Schofield 1993 p.511 and 513). Calum MacDonald in the Times Literary Supplement described it as "...an effective demolition of many of the myths long entrenched around the "English pastoral" school...a wealth of damning detail...a book every future historian will need to confront" (Coope Boyes & Simpson 2013).

Sharp and his fellow collectors began to be seen as (at best) deeply conservative purveyors of nostalgia who sought to create a fictionalized past that could not only provide the basis for a politically acceptable national music but would also support

“A reversion to the historical balance of contented class relations, a pastorate, where the middle as well as the labouring classes happily accepted their allotted places” (Boyes, 1993 p.65).

At worst they (and the folk revival) were part of a process through which

cultural products of the rural working class were taken from them and daintily and selectively re-worked for school and drawing room performance by a coterie of upper-middle-class collectors who profited financially and in status as a result (Boyes, 1993 p.47).

The negative views about Sharp and the early collectors were, of course eventually challenged, and a more positive approach was taken by Onderdonk (1996) (who focuses on the work of Vaughan Williams), Vic Gammon (Roud et. al., 2003), Mike Yates (2003) and Chris Bearman (2001, 2002), whose detailed studies and powerfully expressed arguments went long way towards portraying Sharp in a more favourable light. Gammon pays tribute to Sharp’s legacy in terms of his collection, publications, ideas, influence on education, and provision of the basis of a great national library. Of Harker (of whose work he once seemed an ardent supporter) he now writes “I think Harker’s work was serious and critical, but this does not mean that Harker got it all right.” and of Boyes “uneven in its quality and disputable in some of its interpretations” (Roud et al., 2003, p.19).

4.1.2 Folk music in decline and resurgence

In response to the question ‘does all this really matter?’ folklorist Yates asserts “Well, yes it does. Because if our foundations are based on false assumptions, then the whole subsequent body of folksong and folklore studies is liable to come tumbling down around us” (Yates 2003). Boyes and Harker and their adherents certainly provoked vigorous debate about the folk revival and its foundations, and their challenge to some of the romantic mythologising of the folk movement may have been salutary, if sometimes appearing to contain as much political bias as those whom they criticise. However, by attempting to demonstrate that there never were any ‘folk’ and therefore any genre which can reliably described as folk-song, they have perhaps created more confusion than clarity. The ‘dethroning’ of Sharp, the devaluing of his work (and by association the work of folk song collectors in general), the endless disagreements about ‘what is folk’, or whether indeed there ever was such a thing, may well have contributed to an undermining of the folk scene, and likewise of the perception of English traditions of song and dance.

If the folk revival “took wing in an age of apparent certainty” (Brocken 2003 p.133), by the late 20th century the wax was melting from those wings, and flight became plummet for a genre that was increasingly “embattled, uncertain and protectionist” (Brocken 2003 p.133). For a while, it was almost impossible to use the term ‘folk’ without attracting a degree of ridicule as a result of “the common prejudices that characterise knee-jerk reactions to the mention of folk music” (Stock, 1999). By the mid 90s many folk organisations were dropping the “f word” altogether in favour of terms such as acoustic music or roots music, and in 1999 the leading magazine of the genre changed from Folk Roots (its title since 1984) to fRoots. It appeared that in England the attitude to our own national traditions of dance and song had come, ironically, to reflect the views of Sharp and Karpeles : “The habit of self-depreciation, and the ingrained belief that nothing of musical value can come out of England, have distorted our judgment and blinded our eyes” (Sharp and Karpeles, 1965 p.161-2).

Though some predicted the demise of the ‘folk scene’, others, such as Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson took a more positive view, stressing the resilience of folk music.

"The songs themselves are changing," says Carthy, "they're adapting, people are doing them in different ways, and the music really has resilience, it can take anything you do it." "The only thing you can do to hurt it," adds Waterson, "is not to do it" (Cumming, 25 November 2002)

It is interesting to reflect on similarities between the present era and that of the first folk revival. Economic uncertainty, a decline in the country's status on the international political scene, conflict between rural and urban interests, and beneath and around all this, a questioning of what it means to be English, and how Englishness can appropriately manifest itself in a multicultural society. In these ‘interesting times’ a number of factors have contributed to the re-establishment of English folk music in the public imagination. The creation of an honours degree course in Folk and traditional music at Newcastle University has caused many young musicians to take an interest in the work of the late 19th and early 20th century collectors, and they are performing their own interpretations of this music at clubs and festivals. Folk song research now pays greater attention to the singers and their social context, rather than just the songs they sang, and this is reflected in works such as *Still Growing* (Roud et al., 2003), a book of folk songs which also provides fascinating detail about the singers. A new wave of performers assert their right to celebrate Englishness and English

folk music, not in isolation from but in harmony with the music of other cultures. A report on *Performing Englishness in New English Folk Music and Dance* makes the point that

Performances of Englishness that are being made in the English Folk resurgence are not...made in opposition to or denial of multiculturalism. Rather, there are often attempts to bring this idea of 'traditional' historically rooted English identity, into harmony with contemporary multiculturalism (Winter 2010).

The popularity of Seth Lakeman or of folk 'super-group' Bellowhead, the choice of folk musicians Rachel and Becky Unthank as television presenters, the positive media response to the EFDSS Full English project (a digital archive of folk music collections) all suggest that we are at least moving towards a zeitgeist in which folk music is once more 'cool'.

4.2 English folk-song and the choral repertoire

4.2.1 Adult choirs

English folk-songs have long provided a rich source of repertoire for choirs. Vaughan Williams and Holst and Britten were particularly prolific arrangers, and recordings of their arrangements are still being released. In 2008 for example, EMI released a collection of folksong arrangements by Vaughan Williams and Holst, containing 16 arrangements by Vaughan Williams (originally recorded in 1969, and 9 arrangements by Holst (originally recorded in 1974) in which "melody is king, harmony is queen, and their progeny are blessed with an earthly beauty and a heavenly grace." (Allmusic, 2008). Vocal scores of similar arrangements are still in print, and other more recent arrangements are also available, for example *The Kings Singers' Folk Songs*, and John Rutter's *The Sprig of Thyme*, a cycle of 11 folk-songs arranged for mixed choir and a chamber orchestra, including *The Bold Grenadier*, *The Keel Row*, *The Sprig of Thyme*, *Down By The Sally Gardens* and *The Cuckoo*. The fact that this material is readily available from music publishers indicates a degree of interest in this music, but these arrangements are rarely found to be appropriate for community choirs, due to technical difficulty of the arrangement, a demand for musical literacy or perhaps simply the cost of purchasing the sheet music.

4.2.2 Folk-songs in schools

From folk-songs in the adult choir repertoire, I now turn to their use in schools, where one would expect musical tastes and influences to be developed. According to the Ministry of Education, during the 19th century

The chief obstacle to progress in school singing was the lack of suitable songs, especially for the younger children. Much of the material contained in school song books was adapted from German sources, or specially written; and original matter was frequently banal, in either tunes or words or both...Unhappily the riches of native folk-song were still unexplored; indeed their very existence was generally unsuspected (Ministry of education 1960 p.7).

The Board of Education put the seal of approval on the use of traditional folk-songs in the early part of the twentieth century, just preceding the publication of Sharp's Folk Songs from Somerset (1904). The National Song Book (Stanford, 1905) drew heavily on Chappell's Popular Music of the Olden Time, in an effort to provide a collection of songs for schools that was worthy of the term national. Stanford asserted that the work of other musical traditions should be approached with caution "Exotics have always a fascination about them which it is hard to resist, and you must train your children to appreciate daisies before you present them with orchids" (Stanford 1908 in Cox 1992)

In 1906 Baring Gould and Sharp published a collection of folk songs for schools containing ballads, songs and what are described as "infant songs" and dedicated (by permission) to Prince Edward and Prince Albert of Wales. The collection drew on songs from Baring Gould's Songs of the West and Sharp's Folk Songs from Somerset as well as other sources. The introduction seems to echo the words of Stanford:

The folk-song of one race is not the folk-song of another, any more than the warble of the blackbird is the twitter of the finch. Why, then, should we endeavour to force our children to learn the notes of Germany and France and Italy, instead of acquiring that which is their very own? (Baring-Gould and Sharp, 1906)

Sharp, however, was critical of the National Song Book and of Stanford's use of the term folk-song as synonymous with national song. Describing one of his own collections he wrote "I have confined myself to those (songs) which are traditional, and, being chiefly of folk origin, are of assured humanity". (Sharp 1902 in Cox 1992 p 247). 1906 Sharp wrote to the press criticising the choice of songs. 'Schoolmasters,' he protested, 'in the belief that they are teaching folk-songs, will give the children the songs suggested in the Blue book ... ' (A. H. Fox-Strangways: Cecil Sharp, 1933 in Ministry of Education 1960 p8). Nonetheless the National song Book became an enormously successful work: "Its influence was so widespread that by 1917 it could be boasted that there was hardly a school in the country that did not possess a

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copy” (Cox 1992). Below is a list of songs listed as English Songs, taken from the contents page of the National Song Book.

Begone, dull Care		17th Century
The Hunt is up.		Old English
There was a jolly Miller		17th Century
The Keel row	Northumbrian	18th Century
John Peel		Old Hunting Song
Now, Robin, lend to me thy Bow		Old English
You Gentlemen of England		17th Century
The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington		Traditional
Barbara Allen		Old English
The British Grenadiers		16th Century
Drink to me only	Ben Jonson	
Early one Morning		Old English
Good morrow, Mistress bright	A, P. Graves	" Good morrow ^pretty Maid"
We be three poor Mariners		1609
Oh ! the Oak and the Ash		17th Century
The Roast Beef of Old England	Leveridge	Leveridge
Song of the Western Men	Rev. R. S. Hawker	Old Cornish Ballad
The Vicar of Bray		17th Century
A-hunting we will go	Fielding	18th Century
Come, Lasses and Lads		17th Century
The happy Clown	A. P. Graves	11 The happy Fanner"
To the Maypole haste	Staines Morris Tune	Elizabethan Air
The Mermaid		Old Sea Song
The Spring is coming	G. Macfarren	About 1700
Under the greenwood Tree	Folk Song .	17th Century
The useful Plough	A. P. Graves	
The Bay of Biscay	Andrew Cherry	Davy
Here's a Health unto his Majesty		17th Century
Hope, the Hermit	John Oxenford	17th Century

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Tom Bowling	Dibdin	Dibdin
Sigh no more, Ladies	Shakespeare	Stevens
Ye Mariners of England	Campbell	Calcott
Amid the new-mown Hay	Charles Mackay	"With Jockey to the Fair"
The golden Vanity		
Dulce Domum		17th Century
Farewell, Manchester	John Oxenford	Felton's Gavotte
The Girl I left behind me		"As slow our Ship"
Polly Oliver	A. P. Graves	
Heart of Oak	Garrick	Boyce
Joan to the Maypole		17th Century
The Barley Mow		
Golden Slumbers		"May Fair" 17th Century
Now is the Month of Maying		Morley
Where the Bee sucks	Shakespeare	Arne
Fairest Isle	Dryden	Purcell
Since first I saw your Face.		Ford
It was a Lover and his Lass	Shakespeare	Morley
Cherry Ripe	Herrick	Horn
The Lass of Richmond Hill	Macnally	James Hook
Blow, blow, thou Winter Wind	Shakespeare	Arne

Music of this type, often referred to as folk-song whatever its provenance, dominated the classroom for a number of years. However, in the 1960s and 70s there was an increase in the use of “non western’ music in the curriculum as an influx of ‘ethnic minority’ pupils into primary schools gave an impetus for a wider range of musical genres. It was believed that cultural diversity in music education would foster understanding, tolerance and racial harmony. By 1998 music had gained a more significant place in the National Curriculum

An area of particular interest in the National Music education in the primary school Curriculum document, under 'Specific Issues', was the appearance of the term 'World Music'. This was the first time that this term had appeared in an official curriculum document (Roese, 2003 p 10).

By 1992 it was becoming an expectation that children “should recognise and respond to the characteristic rhythms and instrumental sound of music from Africa, South America, India and the West Indies” (Roese 2003 p 11). ‘World song’ gradually became a significant or perhaps even a dominant presence in the school singing repertoire.

4.3 Community choirs, world song and folk-song

4.3.1 A preference for world music

Some years ago, early in my choir leadership role, I was approached by someone who wanted me to run some song workshops for her singing group. Explaining that hers was a ‘world music choir’ she commented “I see you do a lot of English folk-song - do you do any world songs?” The notion that English folk-song came from some far-off planet entertained and intrigued me, and I began to notice that although many community choirs state that they sing folk songs, it appears that they rarely take much interest in English folksong, preferring to focus on songs in other languages.

What influences community choir leaders in their choices? One factor is training, and for some years one of the only sources of training has been the Voice Workshop Leaders course run by Frankie Armstrong, founder of the Natural Voice network and an iconic singer of British folksong, and her partner Darien Pritchard. This course is attended by many members of the Natural Voice Practitioners Network. The course handbook states that when teaching songs, one should “start with songs in another language first (helps many people to step around inhibiting history of singing in own language)” (Armstrong and Pritchard 2011 p.43). The Voice Illustration CD supplied to course members contains 33 tracks featuring songs from the Hebrides, Solomon Islands, Mongolia, Eire, India, South Sea islands, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Africa, China, Russia, Albania, Bulgaria, Norway, Spain, Australia (Aborigine), Korea, Italy, Sardinia, Corsica, Georgia, Canada (Inuit), and Greece (Armstrong and Pritchard 2011 p.47). There is no example of a traditional English song, despite the availability of recordings of Harry Cox, Fred Jordan, Walter Pardon, the Copper family and numerous others, on CDs such as *A Century of Song* (EFDSS CD02) or the iconic *Voice of the People* series on the Topic label.

English folk material is similarly under-represented in the repertoire used at The Unicorn Voice Camps, which have been running since 1998 and provide a meeting point for many community choir leaders. Songbooks are produced every couple of years; this is the contents of the 2007-9 songbook.

Amen Amen, Baba Wambinguni, Bamba Lela, Begin it! Bobangi, Boyeewiye, Bring Out Your Voices, Cha Cha Cha, Every Voice Shall Sing, Hallelujah, I Want to be Ready, I'll Fly Away, Idonga Se Jeriko, Imaweni, Light of Stars, Lucumi Chant, Malabulabu, Mathine Woi Woi, Mbuti Blessing Chant, My Change Will Come, Nardanina, Navajo Prayer, Ola Mama, Om Namo Narayanaya, Rhythm and Syncopation, Samba Chill, Sanctum Te, Sanctus, Sing It! Sunshine, Fire and Rain, Take One Step, Tender, Tender Heart, Voro Voro, We Got All the Love, Ye Inde Me. (Clarke 2012)

Why should English folk song occupy such a minor role in the community choir repertoire? In her exploration of the predominance of world music in community choirs, Bithell suggests that "Singing unfamiliar songs and using the voice in unaccustomed ways can be liberating at many different levels" (Bithell, 2009). Some of her interviewees indicate that it is easier to sing songs in an unknown language as the meaning of the words does not get in the way, or that using music from different cultures frees people from implied or learned constraints of western classical musical culture, which they may have been taught or have absorbed at school. Others emphasise the importance of harmony, and the way singing with others develops a sense of community. 'World songs' are seen to offer

an alternative to the more familiar repertoire that is often tainted by unwelcome associations, they can also be part of a process of empowerment. Individuals may find a new confidence that goes far beyond the mere act of singing and the confines of the choir (Bithell, 2009).

In addition

Seeking out unfamiliar musics becomes part of the quest for a voice that is perceived as more organic and has access to a broader palette of technical and acoustic possibilities than the bel canto voice, as well as satisfying a hunger for novel harmonies and rhythms. At the same time, songs from distant parts of the globe fuel the imagination, transporting the singer to another place, another time and, perhaps, another identity (Bithell 2010 pp. 564-565)

It may be that generations brought up on the National Song Book or its successor, the New National Song Book, came to equate folk songs with national songs, and with all their attendant associations; racism, notions of superiority and imperialism, support for monarchy and organised religion. If that is the case, then it is easy to see that as nationalism gave way to a concept of a more multicultural society, then national songs also fell out of favour, and if folk songs were perceived as part of that genre, they, like the proverbial baby, were thrown out with the bathwater! Like the music of Vaughan Williams, their reputation has been “blighted by broader cultural forces, in particular by tensions in the national self image” (Frogley 1993 P4).

For community choir leaders who became involved in running choirs during or later than the 1980s, it would be reasonable to suppose that they might either choose to avoid using English Folksongs because of some of the aspects of nationalism mentioned above, or because English folk music had simply fallen out of favour, and so they were not aware of it, had not learned the songs in school, and had no positive examples to inspire them. For others, a barrier might just be a perceived lack of appropriate arrangements of English folk-songs - arrangements which did not pose too many technical difficulties and musical complexity. Some find the genre not to their taste “Personally I don't really like English folk music. There, I've said it! Much English folk music is story-based. I'm not a lyric person so that doesn't really interest me. I'm more into the sounds and the harmonies” Rowbury 2009. As Rowbury points out, a great deal of English song is narrative, a form of story telling set to music, so perhaps not ideally suited to singing with a large group. However, that does not mean it is impossible, and in any case there is a wealth of material that does lend itself to group singing. I will go into greater detail about my approach to arranging songs, in 4.5 below.

If there are some inherent difficulties in using English folk-song with community choirs, there may be some inherent advantages. For example, just as some people may have been put off by negative experiences associated with singing in school, there are others who have negative associations with learning foreign languages, and will find a song in their own language more accessible. Because everyone understands the language, interpretation is easier; we know whether the song is solemn, joyous, witty etc. It may be a great deal easier to find out the provenance of the song, and learn some of its history, this making it more meaningful for singers. This leads into the question of authenticity.

Eastern European singing is often valued by choirs for its excitingly different harmonies and for a sense that by singing this music they are in touch with a living tradition. Reality is, as always, less clear cut. Webster refers to “westernized” socialist constructed polyphonic choral arrangements of Bulgarian songs such as those performed by “Le Mystere des Voix Bulgares.” (Webster 2004 p157) and asserts that an influential model of singing was in fact based on

the Koutev-style performance choir tradition that began in Bulgaria in the early 1950s. Using traditionally monophonic or drone based Bulgarian village melodies, Philip Koutev made arrangements with four and five part western harmonies, adding dynamics and tempo changes, while preserving the throat-placed vocal quality in order to “invent” a new genre of *a cappella female* chorus (Silverman unpublished) Hailed as “national music” of Bulgaria, Koutev’s choir consisted of women from specific and different regions of Bulgaria singing homogenized versions of village music often outside of their original tradition.

4.4 Challenging the dominant culture

4.4.1 Conference

Informal discussions I had over a number of years with community choir leaders led me to a view that, apart from choir leaders who had ‘grown up’ as part of the folk scene (such as Sandra Kerr, Eddie Upton, Carolyn Robson and few others) most were relatively unfamiliar with the breadth of material available under the heading of English folk-song. I felt that it would be very useful to bring together folk singers, community choir leaders and academics to explore the place of this genre in the World music repertoire. In 2011 I initiated a conference called “Out of the World” (50) which was developed with the co-operation of the English Folk Dance and The University of Winchester. The aims of the conference were

- To promote the use of English folk song in the community choir repertoire
- To identify resources in terms of existing arrangements and suitable material
- To discuss cultural and political issues that underpin the choice of repertoire
- To demonstrate the range and diversity of English folk song
- To explore issues for teachers and learners (e.g. teaching a narrative song to a large group)

On May 15th 2011, 60 delegates came together at Cecil Sharp House to listen, discuss and sing. Discussions about musical authenticity, how to teach and perform narrative songs with a large group, the power of regional songs, and the exotic nature of English folksong to someone who approaches it from a different cultural standpoint, were followed by group discussions

and a question and answer session with the panel (June Boyce-Tillman, Carolyn Robson, Sally Davies, David Oliver, Olu Taiwo). Delegates were given a resource pack containing arrangements of folk-songs in notation and on CD, information about resources available via the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library and the Roud index, and details of other sources of repertoire. I believe this to have been the first conference covering this subject area, and the response from delegates was enthusiastic, and suggested not only was the event thought-provoking but that people were genuinely discovering something new, “a gate in my garden that I'd never seen before” (Assersohn 2011), “Now I have been turned on to this music I am seemingly surrounded by it” (Morgan 2012) “England is exotic! This was a big deal for me – breakthrough starting to happen now.” “Experiencing a day of singing with folk conventions – impromptu singing, audience joining in etc. Not used to that kind of approach, it had a lovely feel.”

Two years after the conference, a brief email questionnaire elicited a number of comments including:

- I found the conference very useful and inspiring and have made quite a bit of use of the material, either directly or indirectly
- I was enthused to look into other folk songs that I know and like. I have been singing a lot more in folk clubs too so it formed a valuable part of my introduction to English folk and that performing trajectory as well as helping my term with the choir which was very English folk focused.
- My main gripe was all the English folk songs I had heard were a bit dull in my eyes (compared with Irish songs) but I have realised many have nice tunes and rhythms.
- 1. From the resource pack we joined the Society so receive regular magazines and have used the resource facilities at Cecil Sharp House. 2. It has raised awareness and I always encourage singing of English folksongs.
- The conference inspired me to find songs with more local resonance, and ones to celebrate the land.
- I've used material from the resource pack and started to use more folk songs for warm ups and performance. Everyone really enjoys it!
- the conference was very inspiring and complimentary to my existing ideas and work and gave me much food for thought and play! I took inspiration from the conference CD and made my own arrangement of the Green Leaves.

4.4.2 Song arrangement workshop

A number of conference delegates indicated that they would appreciate help with arranging folk material for their choirs. With the support and co-operation of the Education Director of the EFDSS, I organised a practical workshop day in May 2012 (56). I invited experienced choir leaders and arrangers Alison Burns and Sally Davies to co-lead the event, and on the day we provided some 28 delegates with an opportunity to try out different arrangements of traditional English folk-songs, discuss ideas, approaches and techniques for arranging and address some practicalities (for example, how the use of music software can assist the arranger). Once again, the evaluations were positive, with delegates commenting on “addressing the English folk gap in the Choir repertoire”, that they now “have the confidence and knowledge to make arrangements for my choir” and “go away determined to produce arrangements of my own!”.

4.4.3 Impact of conference and workshop

The evaluation comments (both immediately after the events and at a later time) indicate that those involved have gained new perceptions about English folk-songs and are starting to see ways of including them in the repertoire of their choirs. There is currently a much more positive image of English folk song, and in running these two events I have helped to foster that positive image within the community choir world. I have described in 1.3.1 the lack of representation of English material in some of the NVPN events and publications, so it is particularly gratifying to note that the NVPN Gathering for 2014 has as its theme *Roots and Paths: Celebrating the Folk Music of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales* and also (according to one of the respondents to my 2013 email questionnaire) “both this year and last, the song swap sessions at the annual gathering of the NVPN have included a fair number of British folk songs” (Conference follow-up 2013). I believe that my work (the events described above plus my song arrangements) has played a significant part in re-asserting the position of English folk-song as “just as valid and worthy of a place in a world music choir as other songs” (Conference evaluation form).

4.5 My approach to arranging folk-songs

In Chapter 2 I have described the continuum which has at one end the choir in which the people serve the cause of music, and at the other, the choir where the music is the means of meeting the needs of the people. My stance as a community choir leader lies somewhere

between those two points. I believe in giving as many people as possible the opportunity to sing, and therefore I run choirs that are open access, and have no requirement for music reading with the result that singers in my choirs are of very mixed ability and levels of confidence. At the same time, I care passionately about the songs I teach, and want to respect the music by ensuring that it is sung as well as possible. This means that I have to make very careful choices of repertoire, seeking out pieces that will sound rich and satisfying when sung, without placing undue vocal or technical demands on choir members. It has also spurred me on to create a number of arrangements (many of which are of English traditional songs).

When I started running choirs and singing groups there appeared to be a dearth of this type of material available. Folk musician and former teacher Paul Davenport had also experienced this difficulty:

When I found myself promoted to head of music in the late 1990s I recall having some difficulty in finding much in the way of choral arrangements of English folk song material. There were a number of sets available and I recall teaching a rather avant-garde arrangement of 'Scarborough Fair' which was fun but hardly 'folk'. In fact this was pretty much the 'bottom of the bucket'.

Sally Davies describes a similar problem in 2008 when she was asked to run a choir at Cecil Sharp House (Davies 2013). Even now a trawl through the Resources section of the Natural Voice Practitioners Network shows very few books that mention British or English folk-song.

4.5.1 Challenges to the arranger of English folk-song

There are a number of challenges that lie in wait for the person attempting to arrange an English folk-song for a choir. Below, I have identified some of those, and given some thought to how they may be met, overcome, or in some cases, set aside.

4.5.1.1 *Not an authentic harmonic tradition*

It has been said by many that English folk-song is mainly “an unaccompanied and solo tradition” (Kerr 1994 p.7) and both Sharp and Vaughan Williams seem to have held this view. Certainly, folksongs collections do not contain many examples of songs sung in harmony. However, Malcolm Douglas (2002) points out that most of the time, songs were collected from individuals, rather than from groups and in social situations where harmony singing might have been heard. Gardham suggests that it would have been strange

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if at least some singers did not attempt to sing in harmony as many of them were members of church choirs at some time in their lives. The Fishermen's Choirs and Male-voice choirs sing a lot of hymns and naturally sing simple harmonies, hence the Filey Fishermen's Choir's Three Score and Ten. I also believe the Redmire men who sang White Cockade in harmony were also part of a choir. (Gardham 2012)

It has also been pointed out that collector Frances Collinson failed to note down the wide repertoire of glees and harmony songs sung by the Batt brothers in Kent

One can only deduce that he was looking specifically for one type of song - i.e. the 'folk' song, rather than anything book-learned, even though the item concerned may have been handed down orally from generation to generation, from friend to neighbour (Frampton 2001).

This view is supported by Boyes:

As ideas about what constituted "folksong" developed among collectors in the early Revival, it became accepted wisdom that folksong was "pure melody" - harmony wasn't characteristic. Accompaniment suffered the same fate.

So although harmony was in fact widespread (just read all the references to West Gallery style hymns with complex harmonies being assimilated and sung from childhood upwards), if they heard harmonies applied to songs, collectors didn't accept them. Pure melody was also easier for collectors to notate (Boyes 2012)

Another argument against the harmonization of this material goes as follows: yes, there are examples of songs in harmony, but this a modern invention, and not an authentic tradition. Frampton suggests this as a reason for Collinson's omission of this type of material.

perhaps it was that in the 1940s, when Collinson was active, glees were still perceived as modern songs or art songs from literary sources and therefore not worthy of transcription. (Frampton 2001)

it has also been pointed out that

the earlier collectors had, in the main, a quite specific idea of what they were looking for; they wanted the very old stuff, so they went to the oldest people in the remotest areas much of the time. Singing in harmony was likely to be disregarded by many collectors as a fairly late practice, borrowed from "art", church and popular music. It does indeed seem to be true that this is the case so far as the surviving styles are concerned, though that is not necessarily to say

that harmony was not used in earlier tradition, in other forms; just that there are few records of its use. (Douglas 2002)

Glees were “typically four part harmony songs for male voices” (Frampton 2001) and their influence on the singing style of the Copper family has already been mentioned in 1.5.1.1. They formed a large part of the repertoire of another ‘singing family’, the Millens, from Kent. The Millens and the Batts had a history of singing in harmony (often with the two families combined) that stretches back over a century.

It seems that we do have examples of harmony singing, and while we may argue about how widespread or ancient they are, they may reasonably be called a tradition. “The decisive criterion is that, having been created through thought and imagination, it is handed down from one generation to the next” (Shils p12). From this has evolved a style or tradition of harmony singing which can be experienced at many a folk club or festival.

That this has developed since the 1960s revival is insignificant; there is a sense of continuity of practice, both with traditions of the past and between contemporary events. (Hield p101)

4.5.1.2 Each verse is different

Because so many folk-songs are stories, it is essential that the words are sung in a way which makes sense, even if it means lengthening or shortening a note here or there, or indeed adding one or missing one out. People who are accustomed to singing these songs are used to the fact that the phrasing in each verse will be different. This can cause difficulties when writing an arrangement for a choir; the chances are that the notation for verse 1 will not necessarily fit the other verses. Some arrangers deal with this by writing out the score in full, showing every variation in timing. My approach is to teach the song by ear and not give out any music, though I often record the melody line so that choir members can listen to the phrasing, and do enough repetitions for people to feel at ease with the timing. It is also helpful to explain (as a rule of thumb) that the phrasing the song should be as near as possible to the way they would say it.

4.5.1.3 Losing sight of the song

Plunkett Greene, well-known singer and friend of Lucy Broadwood was of the opinion that

judging by recent experiences, the folk-song merely represents a ready-made vehicle for meretricious harmonies and polyphonic

colour-illustration. The setting of folk-songs is so difficult that it may almost be legally assigned to the old hand. The master of the art does not flaunt his technique in your face or bejewel his Madonnas. He knows that here 'beauty when unadorned is adorned the most'... (Plunkett Greene 1912 p.222)

Folk musician Eliza Carthy comments that in some classical arrangements "the music really overpowers the song, and the production of the song really overpowers the song" (Folk song, art Song 17.35) and maintains the importance of retaining the song's "natural drama" (Folk song, Art Song 17.34). In the same broadcast discussion, Sir Thomas Allen, describes some of Britten's arrangements as "Too tricky " and gives his view that some classical arrangements "get into art song, and I think that's wrong" (22.37).

Folk musician Pete Coe questions the approach of some arrangers:

Apart from sacrificing narrative for texture some of the end results seem to be committing the same errors that some classical composers made, inflicting classical arrangements (in this case choral harmonies) on traditional songs & turn them into something else. I feel sometimes they're missing the point about the nature of the basic melodies. Is it lack of understanding or exploitation? (Coe 2011).

Davenport suggests that there is a

"lack of understanding of the material on the part of the arrangers
This was reflected in the rather supercilious assertions in GCSE syllabi at that time which stated that a student 'playing a simple folk tune' could not achieve the highest tariff in the practical examination"
(Davenport 2013).

No doubt there will always be composers or arrangers for whom the apparent simplicity of an English song is an open invitation to change it into something else: "Having for long sung the polyphonic songs of the Caucasus and The Balkans I felt there was a profound need for chorally sung English folk songs to have something of the bite and power of these Eastern European songs" (Davies 2013). My own standpoint is that our traditional songs, like excellent ingredients in cookery, need little enhancement to allow them to shine. Of course musical opinions are subjective, and there is always scope for new ideas. However, I would place myself alongside Andy Turner in saying that "nothing is actually wrong, but before trying sophisticated jazzy or classically-inspired arrangements, you should have an understanding that the way the Coppers do it is the gold standard!" (Turner 2013).

4.5.2 My guidelines and criteria

4.5.2.1 Trusting my musical instincts – an oral process

My style of arrangement is not based on classical training. Although I learned a small amount of music theory in school, my knowledge of harmony has come from other influences. These include listening to my father playing the piano (anything from music-hall to Fats Waller), singing in school and church choirs, standing in the middle of a crowd of people singing improvised harmonies at a folk event, and working with talented colleagues in a variety of harmony groups. I have learned mainly by ear, and my arrangements reflect what my ears and my feelings respond to, rather than a set of externally established principles. More advanced musical training might well have made my life as an arranger simpler and easier in some ways; on the other hand working to a different set of parameters gives my arrangements their own style and quality, as I have not been trained to ‘follow the rules’.

As a child, I would listen to my father working out harmonies for a piece of music – playing the same few bars over again until he hit the combination of notes that just felt right. I use the word “felt” rather than sounded, advisedly. When I am creating harmonies, I am very much thinking about the meaning, mood and atmosphere of the song, and I know when I have the harmony I am looking for because I get an emotional reaction to the sound, which feels appropriate to the song.

4.5.2.2 Enabling participation

In the introduction to this submission I have mentioned the powerful and uplifting experience of standing in a room full of enthusiastic harmony singers, ‘raising the roof’ as they join in with a well-loved song, and knowing that my own voice is contributing to the richness of the sound. It has felt like a privilege and I am conscious that not everyone has been so fortunate. When I come to analyse the principles on which I base my arrangements, one of them is very simple. It is, as far as possible, to create arrangements that enable people (with their choir or singing group, or just a few friends) to have a similar experience. This usually means using relatively open and robust harmonies, rather than complex ‘close harmony’ such as that of Barbershop music, which depends on extremely accurate singing to sound effective.

4.5.2.3 *Staying true to my concept of the song*

“Not only are the arrangements eminently singable, they also remain true to the songs themselves. I welcome and recommend this book” Eddie Upton, Folk South West (18)

It is possible to use a folk-song as material for an elaborate composition; this may be a creation of exquisite beauty, but I question whether it can still be called a folk-song once it gets “the evening-dress treatment” (Folk Song, Art Song 2012). It is of course a matter of personal taste, so the question I usually ask myself about one of my arrangements is “if that was sung on “the folk scene”, would it work well, or sound completely out of place? Can singers join in with the chorus (or even the verses) or will they be thrown off-balance by the unexpected harmonies or by the way in which the arrangement has ‘re-structured’ the song.

4.5.2.4 *Let the song tell the story*

The desire to over-elaborate an arrangement may be to do with a focus on the music rather than the words. Much English folk-song could well be described as story telling set to music, and it is the words, which will, if well sung, provide much of the interest for the listener. For me, this is part of the appeal of the genre; for others, it is a negative quality “I’m not a lyric person so that doesn’t really interest me. I’m more into the sounds and the harmonies “ (Rowbury 2009). Folk musician, writer and comedian Chris Sugden explains

Tim Laycock told me recently of some old people whose response to his singing of an unaccompanied (but not traditional) song was “It’s really nice to hear a song without any music because then you can listen to the story”.

And adds “But now, when I go to a folk festival and listen to what’s happening in singing workshops, I more often than not hear people being taught to sing tunes rather than words” (Sugden 1997).

If the music of a folksong is of paramount importance, then there may well be some excuse for Constant Lambert’s advice that “once you have played it through there is nothing much you can do except play it over again and play it rather louder” (Lambert 1934 p 164). However, if the words are the most important element, then a simple arrangement can be highly effective. Bearing in mind that “a sense of the text and a feeling for the emotional content should be a major consideration” (Kerr 1994 p.6) I do not believe it is needful, or even wise, for an arranger to do something dramatically different in each verse.

4.5.2.5 Working within the vocal range of the community choir

In my experience, a key factor in arranging for community choirs is that the vocal range should not be too great. There is value in encouraging singers to extend their ranges, of course, but few community choirs have true basses or sopranos, so harmony parts have to be tailored to take this into account. I often write harmony parts which are countermelodies, and which weave around the melody rather than staying constantly above or below. At points where the vocal line is likely to be too high or too low for my singers, I shift it below or above the melody line. This makes it easier for singers with a limited range, while maintaining interesting (though sometimes challenging) vocal lines. In the example below, the melody of this traditional carol is written in the bass line. The countermelody (harmony 2) stays just above the melody line till bar 10, where it drops below for a couple of bars before rising above again at the end.

Harmony 1 is a repeated phrase. My arrangement is quite simple, is easy to teach and in my experience quickly learned, but by varying the use of harmonies 1 and 2 on different verses, an effective performance piece can be created, with singers focusing attention on conveying the meaning and atmosphere of the carol.

Harmony 1

Bells of par - a - dise I have heard them ring

Harmony 2

Down in yon for-est there stands a hall, The bells of par-a-dise I heard them ring It's

Melody

Down in yon for-est there stands a hall, The bells of par-a-dise I heard them ring It's

9

Bells of par - a - dise I have heard them ring.

cov-ered all o - ver with purp-le and pall And I love my Lord Jes - us a - bove an - y thing.

cov-ered all o - ver with purp-le and pall And I love my Lord Jes - us a - bove an - y thing.

The reason for putting the melody in the bass part is that, though many of the women who join my community choirs have a little experience of singing in harmony, many of the men have not sung for twenty or thirty years. When they do join a choir, they often find that, not only are they undertaking something new (i.e. singing) but they are also expected to learn a

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

harmony part. Giving them the tune from time to time tends to increase their confidence, as well as giving variety to the choir ‘sound’ if we are giving a performance.

Experience of running community choirs has shown me that many of the least confident singers gravitate to the tune as they feel this will be the easiest part. Writing arrangements where the melody is the highest part often then results in the least able singers having to sing the highest notes, which is counterproductive. To get around this, I often arrange songs in three rather than four parts, or if arranging in four parts, provide a descant part for singers with higher voices. The example below uses some terminology from the West Gallery tradition. The “air” refers to the melody and is written in the tenor part. The song *Babes in the Wood* is in the repertoire of the Copper Family.

TREBLE

COUNTER

AIR

BASS

Oh don't you re-mem-ber a long time a-go, Those two lit-tle bab-ies their
Now the day be-ing done and the night com-ing on, Those two lit-tle bab-ies sat
Now the rob-ins so red how swift-ly they sped, They put out their wide wings and

The ability to create interesting and accessible arrangements of traditional songs has enabled me not only to provide suitable material for the choirs which I run (see comment by Jean Forster in 5.2.3 (and in Testimonials 72) , but has provided (by means of my songbooks, and contributions to Craig Morgan Robson songbooks) repertoire for other choirs both locally, nationally, and internationally. (See items 17, 19, 24, 30, 47, 71 in portfolio). I have been gratified to find that people beyond the scope of my own choirs have wanted to use repertoire that I have created. My song *Keep You in Peace* (melody adapted from the fiddle tune *Mrs. Jamieson's Favourite*) has been taken up by choirs in the UK, Australia, USA and Japan.

(Portfolio 31). Words and music have been disseminated via choir leader networks and 'YouTube', often without any attribution, with the result that I have been told by more than one community choir that it is in fact an old Celtic song, so I could not possibly have written it!

4.6 Presenting folk music in innovative ways

In this section I give examples of how I have used innovative and creative approaches to the performance of folk-song, introducing it to performers and audience who may not have felt an affinity with music of this type. I focus on a project called *The Way Through the Woods* and describe how I have developed the project in different forms to provide a workshop-based performance for community choirs, an event for schools (32), and a processional performance in a woodland (69). Further evidence is provided on two DVDs *Voices From the Choir* (53), and *Woodlarks – The Way Through the Woods*. (35, 42, 44)

4.6.1 A show based on English folk-song

In her exploration of community choirs and world song, Bithell indicates that these songs can be:

part of a process of empowerment. Individuals may find a new confidence that goes far beyond the mere act of singing and the confines of the choir. Perhaps most significantly, the songs offer a means to enter into community with others. Any of these effects may take the form of eureka moments, of life-changing experiences. (Bithell 2009)

However, I have long been of the opinion that it was not 'world music' alone that could produce inspirational harmonies, an empowering process, or the development of a sense of community with others, and that these can also be achieved by use of material deriving from English folk traditions. Indeed, the work I have done in this field indicates a variety of positive benefits and demonstrates that for many people, understanding the meaning of the words of songs, re-connecting with English folklore and history, acquiring a clearer sense of place and appreciation of their environment as well as having the opportunity to create a conscious act of musical storytelling provides a valuable and memorable experience. While I was conscious of some of the negative attitudes towards folksong that still existed at the time of creating the show, in *The Way Through The Woods* it was my deliberate intention to counter these. counter some of the negativity surrounding folksongs. By using traditional folk songs in combination with more recent songs, and by the inclusion of poetry, prose, history and

folklore, a little drama and a dash of humour, I planned that the songs would be given fresh context and meaning, and would be allowed to come to life in a different way.

4.6.2 Early stages

Since 2003 I have been part of a-capella trio Craig Morgan Robson (aka CMR). As a group, we have a shared interest in encouraging other people to participate in singing and develop harmony singing skills. In 2008 I had devised a themed workshop called The Way Through The Woods, an anthology of songs (mainly derived from the English folk tradition) poetry and prose, which was taught by CMR and performed at Sidmouth and Whitby folk festivals. Most of the songs were performed by a choir of festival-goers, who learned the material over the course of the week and gave a performance on the final afternoon, with a few items being performed by CMR. The success of the format persuaded me that, with a few changes, it could be the basis for a successful community choir event.

4.6.3 Community choir performance

There were a number of challenges involved in putting on this programme with my Winchester choir. One was the inherent tension that arises when community choirs start to perform in public. The difference between singing for ourselves (participative activity) and singing for others (presentational activity) has been explored in Chapter 3 on Leadership. It is my belief that as a choir leader I have to manage the tensions and strike a balance between the demands of process and those of product. In creating a performance of The Way Through the Woods, I knew that I would have to keep my eye firmly on both the wood and the trees; as a group we would have to develop a greater emphasis on musical competence, technical skills and attention to detail, without sacrificing the community choir ethos of singing for fun! I also had to deal with the issue of presenting folksong to both choir and audience in a way that would challenge rather than reinforce any existing prejudice, and produce a concert that would be both enjoyable and artistically satisfying for performers and audience alike. As both the choir and the folk trio sing without instrumental accompaniment I was keen to add an instrumental component to the mix, and this took the form of an overture for brass, specially written for the project by Professor June Boyce-Tillman, which incorporated the melodies of many of the folksongs used in the piece. With the assistance of Professor Boyce-Tillman, I was able to involve brass players from the University of Winchester's Foundation Music programme, many of whom were completely unfamiliar with folk music or with community

choirs. The performers were now lined up and the cast assembled: the choir (Winchester Community Choir), the folk singers (CMR) and the classical musicians (Brass 22).

4.6.4 Developing the material

The material I was introducing to the community choir consisted of songs and a few rounds interspersed with poetry and prose to set the sung material in context and to create some kind of dramatic shape. The journey begins with trees in history, legend, ritual and magic, ventures into the darker and more threatening aspects of the 'wild-wood', and then moves to the recognition of the place of trees in a fragile environment, before turning to new growth and celebration to close the performance. There were twelve songs in this version of the show as well as three rounds, and all but four of musical items were sung by the choir, the others being performed by the trio (CMR), with the choir joining in refrains and choruses. Most of the material used has reasonable claim to be considered part of an evolving folk tradition. A few are more recent compositions; Kipling's poem 'A Tree Song' was set to music by the late Peter Bellamy, but has found its way into the folk repertoire, as has my own composition, 'Cottage Garden Trees'. 'Linden Lea' was felt by many choir members to be a folk-song, though the poem by William Barnes was set to music by Vaughan Williams and arranged by folk musician Lester Simpson.

To be acceptable to the choir, the material needed to be satisfying, exciting and fun to sing, without being unreasonably challenging. It called for arrangements which would feel unforced, and which would not alter the character of the songs too much, and I have described my approach to arranging such songs in 1.5 above. All but one of the songs in the show were arranged in three part harmony, and in some instances verses were sung in unison, introducing harmonies only in the chorus. Of these arrangements six were written by me and one by Lester Simpson, and of the songs sung by the trio one was arranged by me and the others by all three of us in a collaborative process. By adding a couple of solo songs, and some additional readings, I extended the duration of the show from its 'folk festival' format to make it a concert lasting just under 2 hours, including an interval.

I also needed to ensure that repertoire fitted the culture and ethos of the choir. Community choirs, like all organizations, differ in terms of their culture, customs, values and 'tribal traditions'. My observation of a variety of community choirs have led me to the view that many of them have very strong cultures, with widely shared core values and a strong sense of

commitment. Harrison's 'support culture', with values such as promotion of a sense of community, and integration of people, is typical of community choir culture (Harrison 1972 in McKenna 2000: 480). The environmental and ecological theme of *The Way Through the Woods* gave it a particular appeal to my choir members, many of whom would not, I knew, wish to sing something which was not in accord with their own ethical stance.

4.6.5 Managing the process

One of the key factors in the process has been that of developing trust in the musical expertise and personal resources of others. Time constraints precluded joint rehearsals, and so I had to trust that each musical group would manage its own part in creating the evening's performance. Within the CMR trio we are highly reliant on each other in performance, and have developed a degree of confidence and empathy that now feels instinctive. The Brass 22 group was the least familiar element to me; however, as the overture formed a discrete section of the overall performance, I felt that I did not need to do more than be in touch with their Musical Director. This left me free to focus on working with the community choir.

In a previous chapter on Leadership I have explored a number of models of choir leadership and devised a community choir leader that moves through different aspects of the roles. From my perspective, when working with a community choir the emphasis is very much on the group: the nature of the choir enables song leaders to share their music and their delight in music with others. In my own practice, I have found the greatest influence to be not a model of leadership but the model of facilitation as developed by John Heron (Heron 1989) which puts the emphasis on the importance of the group rather than on the musical director or conductor. 'A facilitator is [...] a person who has the role of helping participants to learn in an experiential group' (Heron 1989: 11). 'By an experiential group I mean one in which learning takes place through an active and aware involvement of the whole person – as a spiritual, thinking, feeling, choosing, energetically and physically embodied being' (Heron 1989: 11). Acting as a musical facilitator does not absolve the conductor from an authoritative or directive role, but it does encourage the notion that being directive is only part of a multi-faceted engagement with the group. Heron identifies three Modes; Hierarchical, in which the facilitator directs; Co-operative, where there is shared power; Autonomous, in which group members are given freedom to find their own way. These modes may be used in any of six Dimensions (Planning, Meaning, Confronting, Feeling, Structuring, Valuing); the skill of the

facilitator is to move elegantly between the Modes and Dimension, making positive and constructive choices in how to work with the group.

My decision to provide a ready-made package of material, with existing song arrangements and a pre-written script was clearly hierarchical. Opportunities for more cooperative and autonomous working came through the way in which we learned the songs and in the process of choosing readers for the spoken parts of the performance. Unlike some choirs, we have no rules about who should sing which part. Men and women are free to sing soprano, alto, tenor or bass lines and I encourage people to experiment and to explore their vocal ranges and extend their musical skills by moving to different parts from time to time. All the harmonies are taught and learned 'by ear', using a process of listening and repetition which is no different from the way in which people have learned songs for hundreds of years before the widespread use of musical notation. During the learning process, it is normal practice for everyone to listen to and try out all the harmony parts. People have a chance to decide which vocal line best suits the range of their voice and their level of confidence, and it is common to see people changing from one section to another at this stage. It was interesting to me that while we were learning one of the songs for *The Way through The Woods*, most of our male voice section (who are more baritone than bass in terms of vocal range) decided that the line they were singing was too low for comfort, so we agreed to exchange their harmony line with that of the altos. In one piece, I encouraged choir members to make up their own harmonies for last few bars. Initial alarm at the idea was gradually replaced by acceptance and confidence, and the process was accompanied by a number of discussions about the relative musical values implied by phrases such as 'just making it up', 'improvising', and 'composing'.

Decisions about who would read the various spoken items were tackled as a group, with choir members opting for whichever items appealed to them. Some were individual pieces, others involved up to six people and included a degree of interaction or dramatization. Apart from a small amount of coaching mainly focused on voice projection, these performers developed their contributions autonomously. This not only contributed to a strong sense of ownership of the material by choir members, but because items were rehearsed separately by individuals and small groups (who also came up with their own ideas for props and stage 'business'), the project retained a sense of freshness and discovery, and a degree of improvisatory freedom. No-one, including me, saw the show in its entirety until the actual performance.

4.6.6 Woodland promenade performance

Portfolio - 69

4.6.7 Conclusions

These experiences and projects shown above indicate that there is a strong interest in English folk-song if people know where to find it and if it is arranged and presented in accessible and interesting ways. I have made significant contributions (as shown in this chapter) to the furtherance of English folk-song as material for choirs and also as a source of pleasure for the wider audience.

The Way Through the Woods material is in portfolio (32, 35, 42, 44, 66). Evidence also on Woodlarks material (59 and 69) and Voices from the choir (53)

5 Summary and conclusions

5.1 Introduction

Unfortunately, a sudden onset of serious ill health has prevented me doing as much work on this submission as I would have wished. Please accept this far from perfect submission.

5.2 Summary

Chapter 1: I have indicated my personal values as a musician and choir leader. Evidence in portfolio: (72)

Chapter 2: I create a model to aid understanding of different kinds of choirs, and to underline the importance of providing musical opportunities for the ‘musically disenfranchised’.

Chapter 3: My analysis of different roles taken by community choir leaders has been helpful to me as a leader, and, I maintain, fills a gap in the discourse of leadership where it applies to the community choir world. I also provide evidence of my choir leadership training – portfolio (57, 67).

Chapter 4: I demonstrate ways of arranging folk-songs which maintain their character, while providing a satisfying experience for singers in community choirs and groups. I also demonstrate how my ‘challenge’ to the world music culture in choirs has resulted in greater interest in use of English material.

Evidence in portfolio (17, 24, 31, 34, 50, 51, 55, 56, 58, 71)

5.3 Conclusion

I believe that the body of work I have presented as a portfolio, plus this context statement will provide you with sufficient evidence to support my claim to doctoral status, with “the authority as an originator of practice to debate matters on an equal footing with others in the field or profession” (Costley and Lester 2012 p.260).

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Context statement – Sarah Morgan

CONTENTS OF EVIDENCE BOX

Number	date	Item	context/notes
1.	1974	That Brave Commotion – LP cover	My first recording venture
2.		Circa 1985 New Wood – digitized copy of cassette tape	Recording with American singer, Mary Eagle. We toured in UK during early/mid 1980s and made various folk festival appearances.
3.	1988	Bread and Roses LP (cover) and digitized copy - Bread and Roses	First “significant” harmony group. We were an influential group, and singing with B and R involved me in workshops and concerts throughout the UK (Sidmouth, Bracknell, Whitby, Chippenham, Towersey and many other festivals).
4.	1991	Bread and Roses LP (cover) and digitized copy - Mr Fox’s Garden.	
5.	1991 - 2011	Management and leadership work history, examples and testimonials	Example of leadership and development work
6.	1994	Programme and CD copy of cassette – A Tolpuddle Man.	I toured with this show in England and Ireland
7.	1995	Article in Hampshire Magazine pp 30-31	Account of research carried out with Steve Jordan, into the life of Dick Hall, source singer.
8.	1995	A Day’s Work - “folk opera”. Cassette, script, programme, photographs.	I was a cast member and provided additional music and lyrics.
9.	1998	Hen Party CD - Nobody Here But Us	

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

10.	1998	Fieldwork CD – The Voyage	Contributed additional music and lyrics
11.	2000	Whitby Folk Festival Video – Time and Tide	Directing “festival choir”
12.	2001	Wiltshire Folk Association letter	Invitation to be on Judging panel for Young Folk Musician award
13.	2001	Hampshire Choirs CD – Beneath Our Changing Sky	Connection with TAPS – assisting Roger Watson in selection of material
14.	2002	Hen Party CD – The Heart Gallery	
15.	2002	TAPS workshop - notes for my workshop on Performing Traditional Songs from Hampshire and the Surrounding Counties.	
16.	2003	TAPS board membership - evidence of my involvement	
17.	2003	Songbook – View The Land	A collection of my own folk-song arrangements for groups and choirs. A significant step for me, in valuing my own musical creativity, and validating my own work.
18.	2004	Folk South West newsletter – review of View The Land	This makes a point about style of arrangement, and also predominance of world music.
19.	2004	Songbook – Put the Stars to Flight	Collection of my own songs and musical settings.
20.	2004	Folk South West newsletter	Description of joint choir concert – Winchester and Stanchester community choirs
21.	2004 - 2013	CMR information – reviews, fliers, etc.	
22.	2005-	Winchester Community Choir – archival material. Examples of	

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

	12	concert programmes, learning CDs, choir magazine etc.	
23.	2005	Craig Morgan Robson CD – Peppers and Tomatoes	
24.	2005	Songbook – Cottage Garden Trees	A second collection of my arrangements (mainly traditional songs)
25.	2005	Folk Songs from Hampshire and Dorset	I sing on two tracks and conduct Broughton Community Choir
26.	2004- 2006	Hampshire Voices project – flier, notes, article etc	Community choir project (which I initiated) for three choirs to learn and present a selection of songs collected in Hampshire by Gardiner.
27.	2006	Craig Morgan Robson second CD – Stranded	
28.	2006	Hog the Limelight programme	I developed a “folk show” <i>Tales of Otherness</i> , which was accepted as part of the Hampshire Village Halls arts programme.
29.	2006-7	CHARM – collaboration with CMR, Mary Humphreys and Anahata	Script, press release, article, advertisement, poster.
30.	2007	CMR first songbook – When The Snows of Winter Fall	I contributed to the arrangements, set the music and added performance notes and additional text.
31.	2007	Keep You In Peace – selected for inclusion in OUP Folk Voiceworks	P. Hunt edited and changed some of the music to fit in with more classical principles, so I have attached his version and my original.
32.	2007	The Way Through The Woods – project for Schools Outline and review by Head teacher.	Schools version linked to curriculum
33.	2007 - 13	Spotlight Singers (at Lights Arts Centre, Andover) Application for grant (Test Valley Arts Foundation), poster – report of first year’s progress. DVD of Christmas concert 2010? Rehearsal	Relates to formation of Andover Spotlight Singers

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

		2011. Christmas concert programme 2011. Lights brochure 2013 showing continued existence of choir.	
34.	2008	Sing Out - CD– Alton Community Choir	Community Choir CD featuring 7 of my arrangements
35.	2008	The Way Through the Woods – DVD of performance and workshop evaluations from Sidmouth and Whitby folk festivals.	Workshop based show which I devised, performed by CMR and choir of festival goers.
36.	2008	Folk South West Newsletter	Review of Easter School at which I was a tutor
37.	2008	Winchester Passion DVD	I conducted the ‘Passion Chorale’ at this community event, and members of WCC sang my song, Keep You in Peace.
38.	2009	DVD of Take 6 launch concert (EFDSS)	I was one of the performers at the launch concert for the EFDSS Take Six project
39.	2009	Craig Morgan Robson & The Askew Sisters CD – The Axford Five – plus script for performance	Show and CD (songs collected by Gardiner from women singers in Hampshire) in collaboration with Hazel and Emily Askew
40.	2009	Craig Morgan Robson CD – Humming Bird’s Feather	
41.	2009	Leaflet and music for Folk South West carols weekend	Tutoring
42.	2010	The Way Through The Woods – programmes for performances with Petersfield and Winchester Community Choirs. (see also 2008 – Sidmouth and Whitby)	Can add fliers /programmes from performances with Alton Community Choir, Tynedale, Berwick on Tweed – project has a life of its own!

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

43.	2010	Our Singing History – poster plus notes of my talk	Talk about George Gardiner, illustrated with songs, for Valley music festival
44.	2010	Way Through The Woods – working copy of script for CMR plus choir and band.	
45.	2010 - 13	Hampshire Voices (continued). Evidence of continued involvement with Hampshire traditional folk-song.	
46.	2010?	Bugles from Sad Shires - DVD	I conduct Petersfield Community choir, singing 2 songs including one of my own
47.	2011	CMR songbook – The Wind May Blow	I contributed to the arrangements, set the music and added performance notes and additional text.
48.	2011	Chipping Norton Music Festival Syllabus	I was adjudicator for the folk song section
49.	2011	Hampshire Community Choirs Festival. Details of day plus summary of evaluations, and our learning points	
50.	2011	Out of This world – Conference. Conference details, resource CD, summary and analysis of evaluations, articles relating to the conference in EDS magazine and Sounding Board journal	National Conference for choir leaders etc examining place of English folk-song in world music.
51.	2011- 12	Articles written about Out of This World Conference	Article for University of Winchester - 'Artful Dodges' Article in Sounding Board – Journal of Community Music
52.	2011	Taking part – 27 th European Seminar in Ethnomusicology.	Paper given on Community Choir Case study.

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

53.	2011	Voices from the Choir - DVD	Recordings made over six months, showing choir rehearsals, discussions and performance.
54.	2011	Eversley Carols workshop day and performance	Tutoring on workshop day of West Gallery Carols collected in Eversley, Hampshire.
55.	2012	West Dean College – “A Joyous Tradition” – an introduction to singing British folk songs in harmony.	First example of a course on British Folk song at this internationally recognized Arts College. (See Brochure for more details)
56.	2012	Singing in Harmony – Arranging English Folk Songs for Choirs. Flier, outline of day, notes for my session on music software.	Workshop day which I initiated and developed in association with the EFDSS, and led in collaboration with 2 other tutors.
57.	2012	Song Leaders Workshop – one day course. Flier and programme. Evaluations.	Course for community choirs which I devised and ran with Carolyn Robson.
58.	2012	Song arranging – “mini’ workshop. Handout notes plus email from Pauline McWilliams	This was a scaled down and very informal version of the EFDSS event, for local choir leaders who were unable to get to London.
59.	2012	Woodlarks project year 1 – fliers, photos, evaluations for singing workshops in woodland setting.	
60.	2012	The River is Flowing – Wherwell pageant DVD	I contributed a number of songs to the score, and conducted the Spotlight singers as part of the performance. CMR also performing
61.	2012	Whitby Folk Festival programme	Indicates CMR’s continued involvement with this major festival, as performers and workshop leaders.
62.	2012	At War’s Command – show compiled for CMR on Remembrance	Script, programme, poster, flier, review, examples of performances.

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

		theme	
63.	2012	In a Golden Coach – DVD. I sing a ballad with Jeff Gillett and conduct Winchester Community Choir.	
64.	2012	Andover Trees United. Contributed to local environmental project. Song workshop on woodland theme, and then led singing during tree planting launch day.	Programme for launch, photographs, workshop words, correspondence with project manager.
65.	2012	Sarah Morgan & Jeff Gillett CD – The Flowers and the Wine CD plus festival website details	Evidence of continuing activity as a performer in the field of traditional folk-song.
66.	2013	Feedback from Way Through The Woods at Berwick	Slightly revised performance – open to all. People booked in advance, were sent resources beforehand, one day rehearsal and evening performance.
67.	2013	Songleaders course – Five day course for community choir leaders. Course outline, handouts, evaluations	
68.	2013	Chippenham Folk festival	Various CMR concerts, and concerts with Jeff Gillett, CMR performance of At War's Command.
69.	2013	Woodlarks year 2 project details – workshops leading to “scratch choir” performance (new version of The Way Through the Woods).	Fliers, resource CD and DVD of performance (June 2013)
70.	2013	“Saying Goodbye” Order of service and newspaper article. Community choir supporting this organization.	Example of choir activity.

Context statement – Sarah Morgan

71.	2013	Portfolio of unpublished arrangements	
72.	2013	Testimonials (musical)	
73.	2013 -	Invitations to take part in future work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Request to provide arrangements and also workshop day as part of EFDSS Full English project. 2. Invitation to deliver presentation or workshop at Natural Voice Practitioners Gathering in 2014